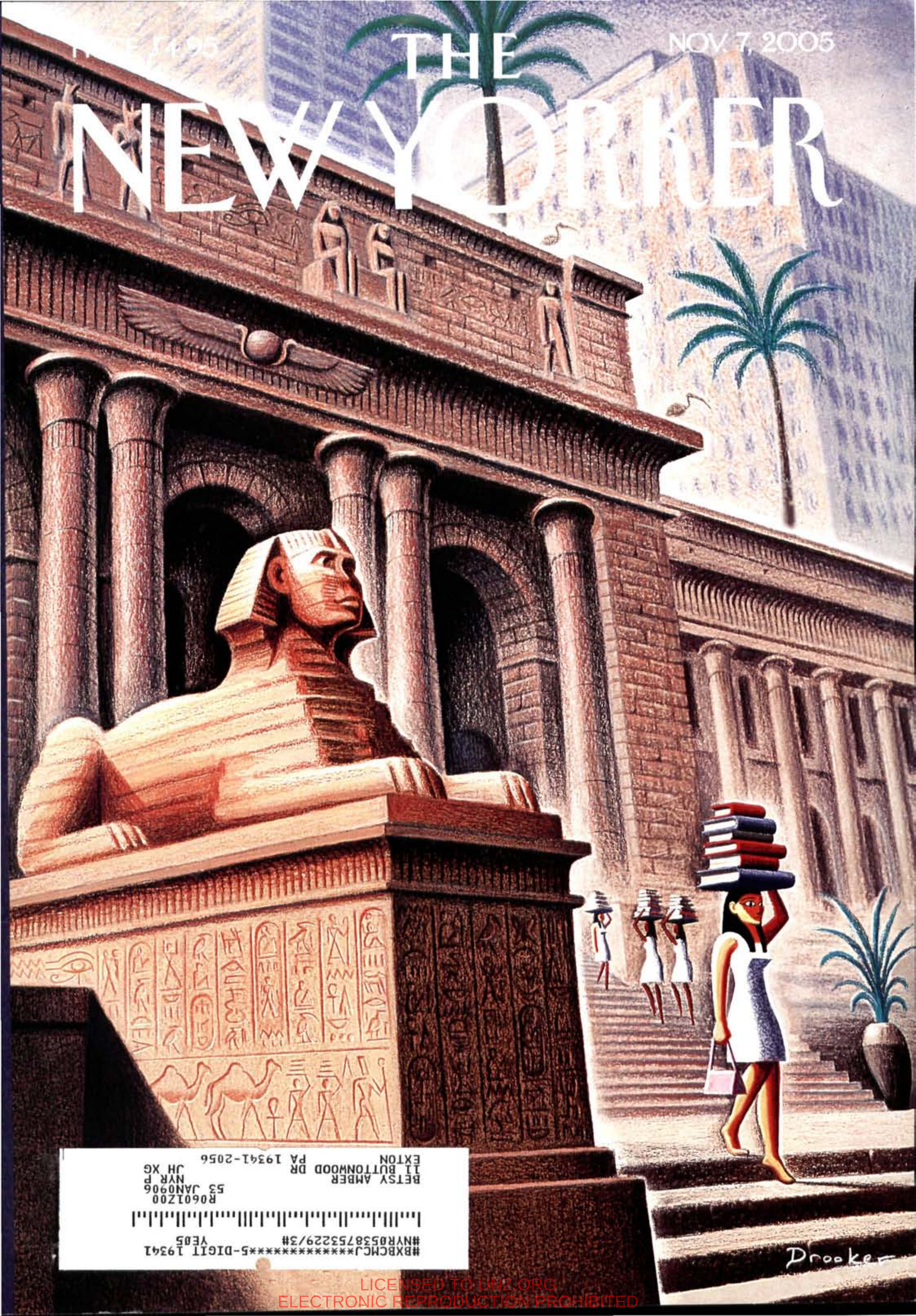
THE NEW YORKER

NOV. 7, 2005



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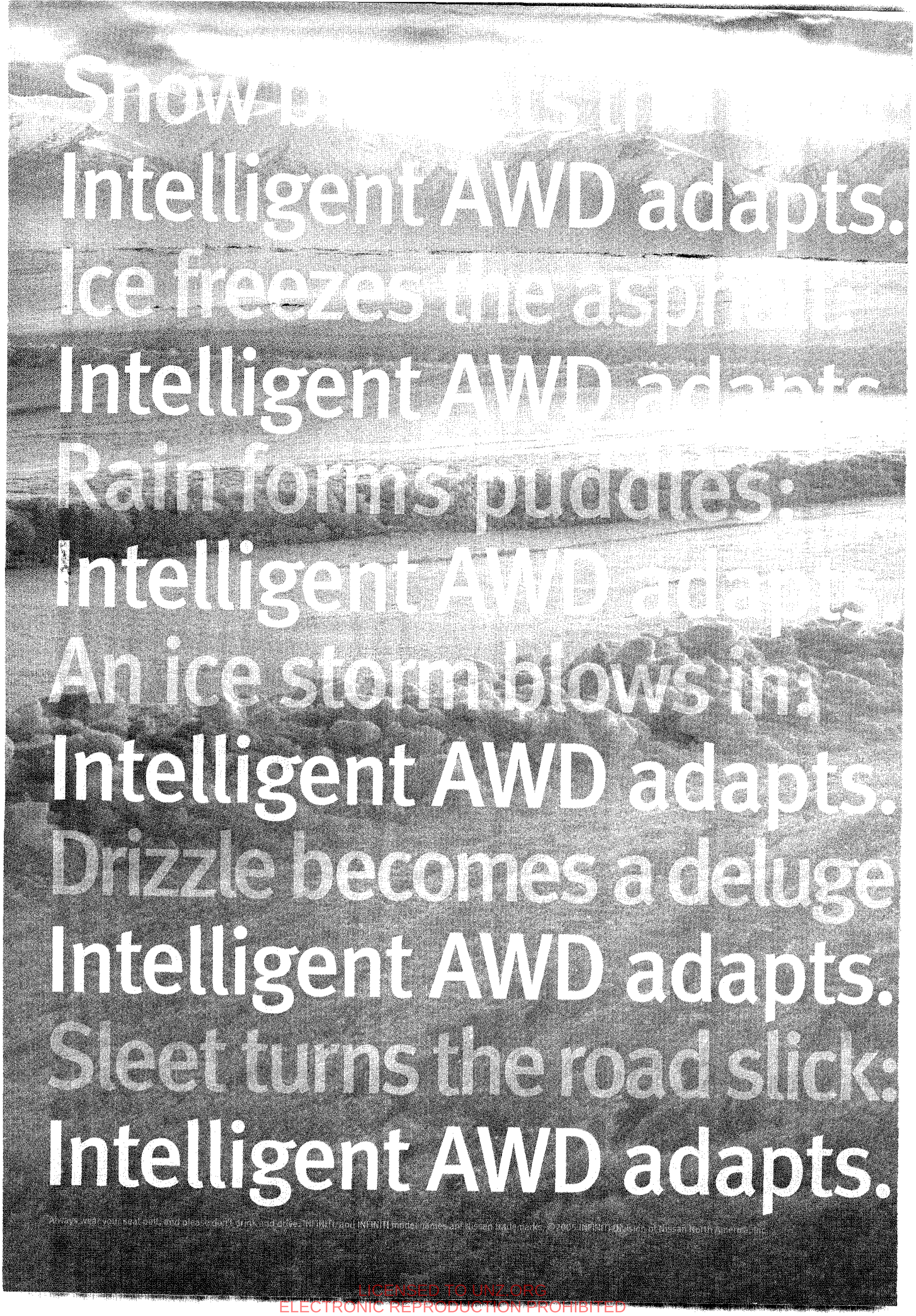
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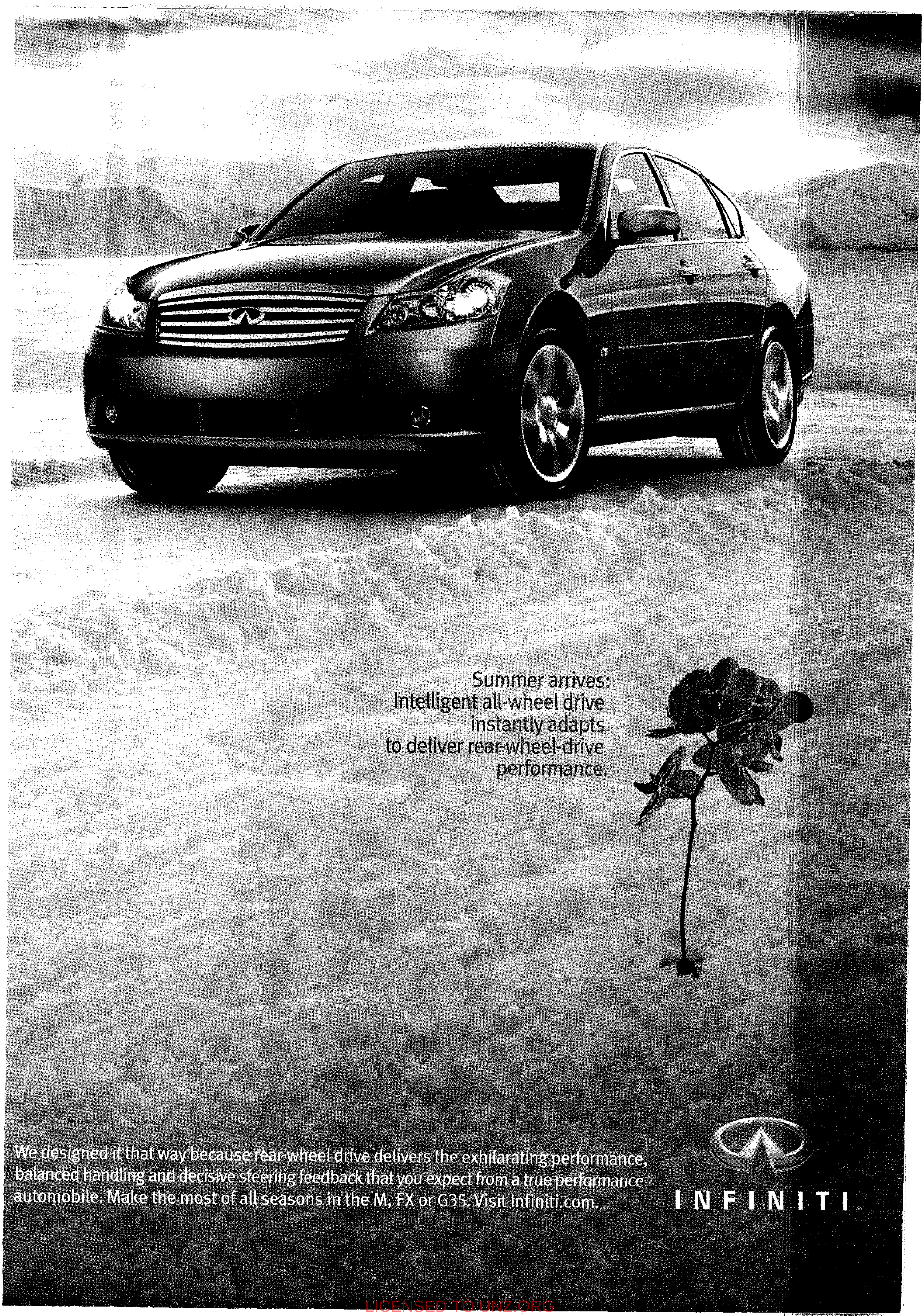

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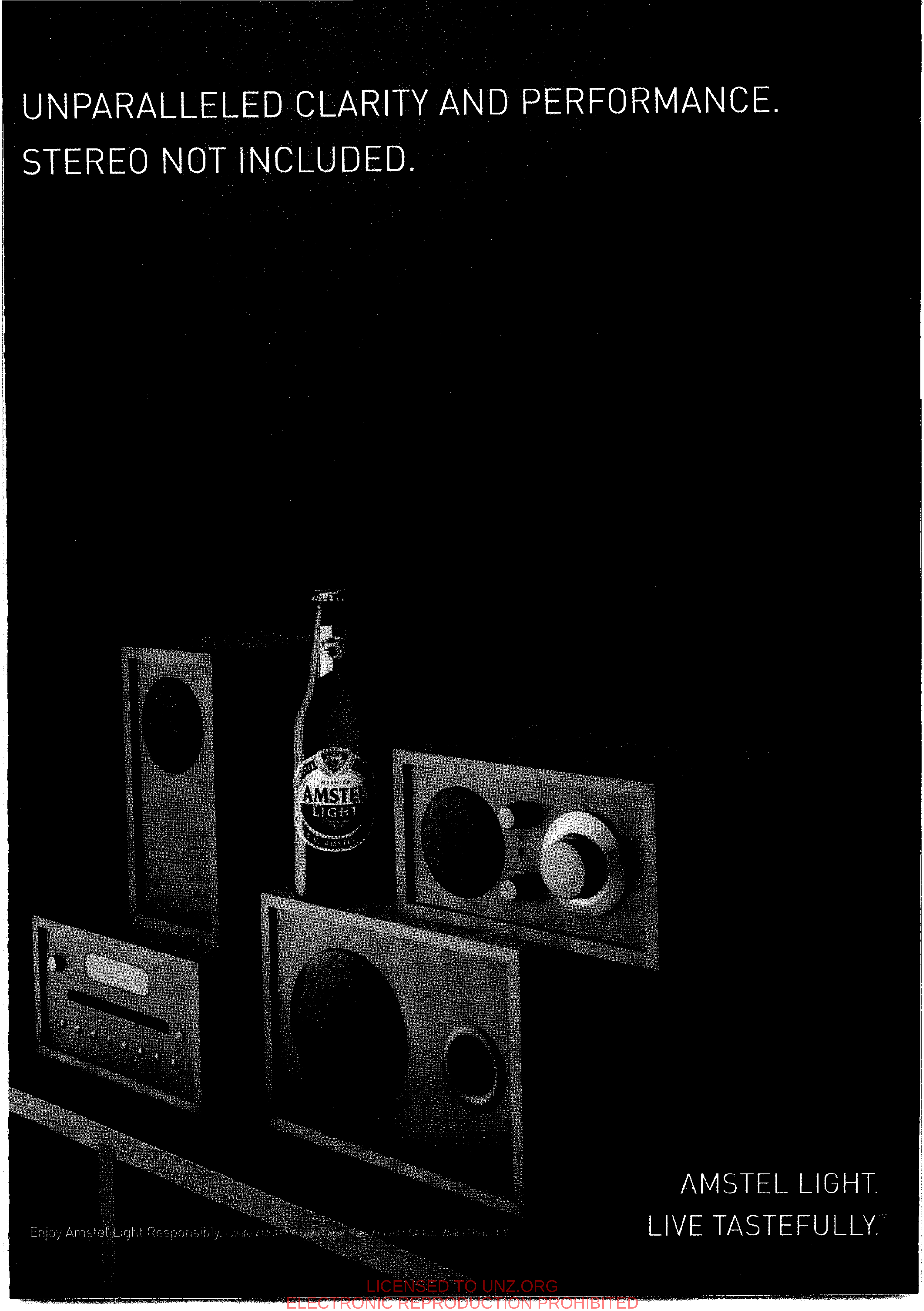
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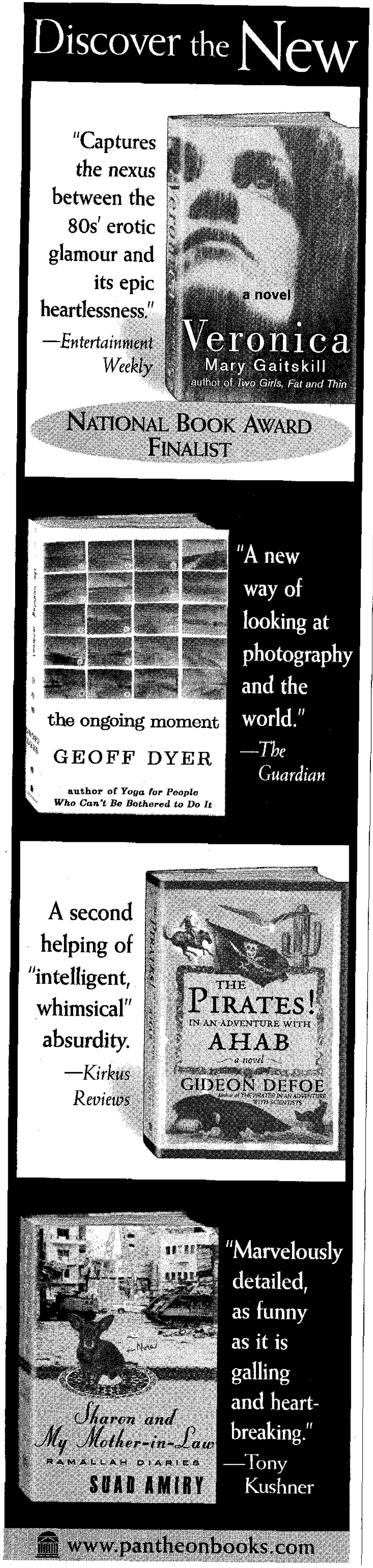

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Mary Gaitskill
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the ongoing moment
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author of *Yoga for People Who Can't Be Bothered to Do It*

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—*Kirkus Reviews*

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AHAB
a novel
GIDEON DEFOE

Sharon and My Mother-in-Law
RAMALLAH DIARIES
SUAD AMIRY

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—Tony Kushner

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CONTRIBUTORS

Nicholas Lemann ("Telling Secrets," p. 48) is the dean of the Graduate School of Journalism at Columbia University and a staff writer.

James Surowiecki (The Financial Page, p. 46) writes a regular column on business and finance. His book "The Wisdom of Crowds" is out in paperback.

Rachel Cohen ("Artist's Model," p. 62) is the author of "A Chance Meeting: Intertwined Lives of American Writers and Artists."

Ian Frazier (Shouts & Murmurs, p. 58) has a book of essays about New York City, "Gone to New York," coming out this month.

Eric Drooker (Cover) is an illustrator and the author of "Flood!" and "Blood Song," two graphic novels.

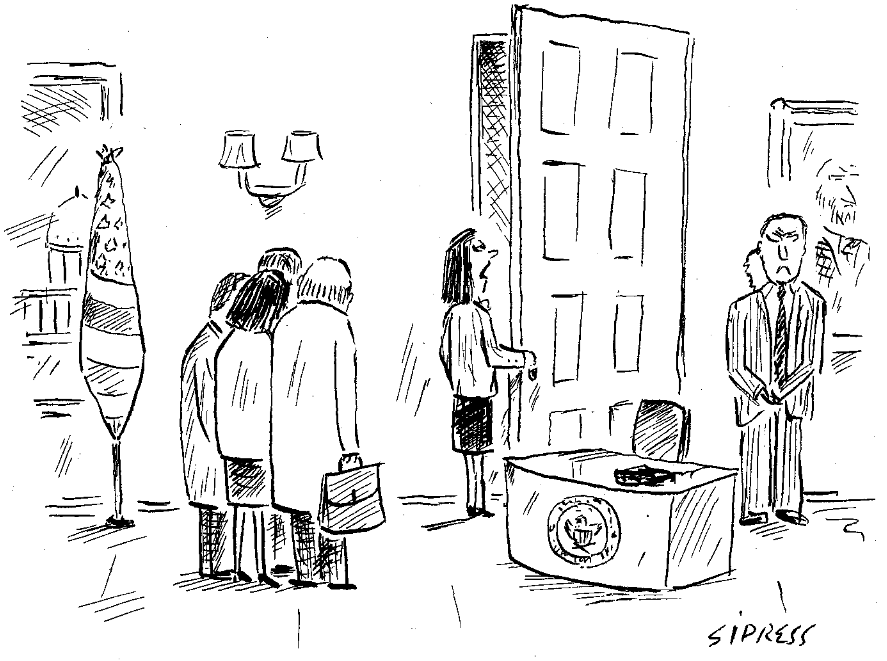
Larissa MacFarquhar ("Present Waking Life," p. 86) has been writing for the magazine since 1997.

Marisa Silver (Fiction, p. 110) is the author of the short-story collection "Babe in Paradise." Her novel "No Direction Home" was published in June.

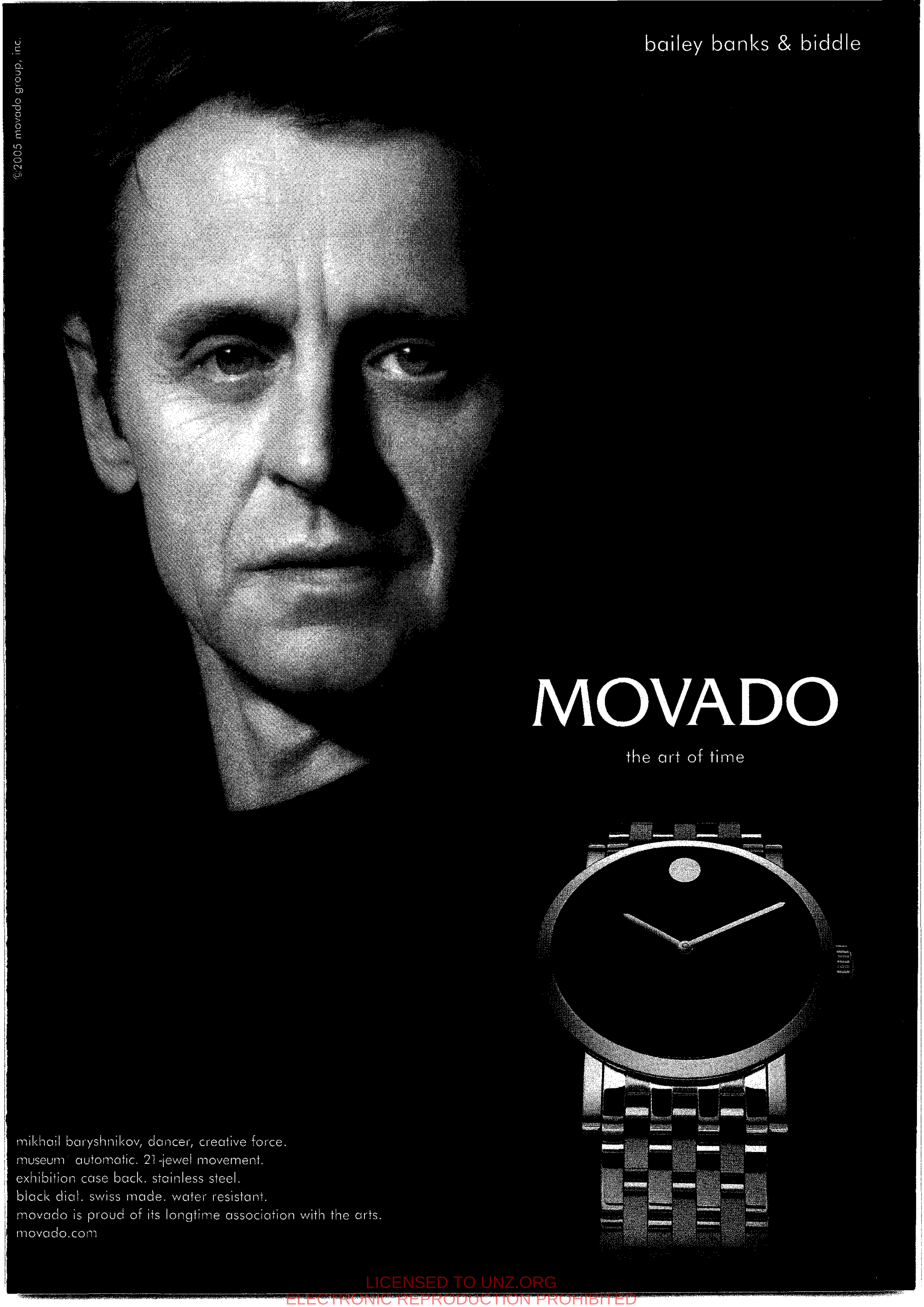
Elizabeth Kolbert (Books, p. 134) has a book about global warming, "Field Notes from a Catastrophe," coming out in March.

Caleb Crain (A Critic at Large, p. 126) is the author of "American Sympathy: Men, Friendship, and Literature in the New Nation."

John Updike (Books, p. 140) is a regular contributor. "Still Looking," a collection of his essays on American art, will be published later this month. ♦



"Pardon me, sir, it's your ten-o'clock cabal."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THE MAIL

L.A. STORIES

Ken Auletta's recent article about issues facing the newspaper industry and relations between the Los Angeles *Times* and its owners, Tribune Company, contained several mischaracterizations, including a reference to circulation misstatements at *Newsday* announced in 2004 ("Fault Line," October 10th). Auletta writes, "Executives presumably intent on meeting the Tribune Company's profit goals had lied about the numbers, inflating advertising rates." To link profit goals with fraud in this way is pure speculation. There has been no such fraud at any other Tribune newspaper or television station, and Tribune annually requires all employees to sign a Code of Business Conduct, which strictly prohibits this kind of activity. All in all, I was sorry to see that Auletta cast his story as a struggle between journalists and "corporate suits." The issues facing the newspaper industry are far more complex than such a "heroes and villains" approach suggests.
Gary Weitman
V.P., Corporate Communications
Tribune Company
Chicago, Ill.

Dean Baquet, of the Los Angeles *Times*, is a friend of mine, and he has my respect as a journalist, but I have to pipe up about his comments to Auletta regarding the days of more robust staffing in the paper's Orange County edition. He said that the edition was scaled back because "it was marketing; it wasn't journalism." I was the editor of that edition from 1993 to 1996, well before Baquet arrived in Los Angeles, and I witnessed some exquisite journalism—energetic coverage of devastating Laguna Beach fires and the biggest municipal bankruptcy in American history, along with an investigation of airline safety that won one of our profession's top investigative-reporting prizes. I was also privileged to work with a host of fine journalists who have gone on to prominence in leading newspapers around the country and, in a couple of cases, Pulitzer Prizes. Of course, reasonable people can disagree about the appropriate level of staffing for Orange County, but there was nothing smarmy about the ambitious initiative there. Staff size reflected an intensive effort to attract readers in America's fifth most populous county, which has three million residents, vibrant arts and business sectors, and an identity distinct from Los Angeles. Sure, the paper was trying to market itself, but its best marketing weapon was some damned good journalism.
Martin Baron
Editor, The Boston Globe
Boston, Mass.

HOUSE PROUD

Appraising Rocío Romero's innovative L.V. project, Paul Goldberger writes that, "apart from the mobile-home industry, no one turning out houses on an assembly line has made an impact in the housing business" (The Sky Line, October 17th). It's worth remembering, however, that a significant number of dwellings have been built from modular units manufactured in some two hundred factories throughout the United States. Entire communities have been built exclusively with factory-built modular units. Goldberger does not refer to the remarkable history of factory-built houses in this country, whether visionary experiments by distinguished designers—Buckminster Fuller's 1946 Dymaxion House, for example—or successfully marketed houses, such as Carl Koch's Techbuilt House. Remarkable as Romero's work is, it should be understood in the context of a rich and extensive history.
Antony Herrey
Cambridge, Mass.

Goldberger writes, "Most mobile homes are aluminum-sided banalities that are supposed to look like traditional suburban houses but fool nobody, and whose sole virtue is that they are cheap." However, there is hardly such a thing as a mobile home anymore. The term itself has been obsolete since the seventies, and its replacement, "manufactured home," is far more accurate for today's factory-built houses, which are usually installed on secure foundations. Aluminum siding is similarly outmoded; more common is a fireproof concrete product that is also common on site-built homes. And these homes are not always cheap. I live in one, and it cost me, per square foot, no less than what a comparable site-built home would have cost to build in my region. Prices of materials and fuel have sent the cost of manufactured houses up dramatically in the past couple of years. So what do people gain by buying one? Primarily, a guarantee of superior construction. In some parts of the country, fly-by-night contractors and shoddy building are a serious problem, and buying a manufactured home from a reputable maker is one way to insure that you get what you pay for.
John Edmonds
Cloudcroft, N.M.

Nick Paumgarten's piece on Peter Bearman's sociological study of doormen relays Bearman's ridicule of the assertion by doormen that they provide a security service (The Talk of the Town, October 10th). But, rather than blaming doormen for "producing the imaginary disorder that they then claim to stop," Bearman should acknowledge the role played by building managers and residents in creating this "imaginary disorder." Doormen are regularly warned that they will be fired for creating a security breach if they leave their posts unattended, or if they do not screen visitors. Tenants have an obvious interest in playing up the security aspects of the doorman's job; otherwise, they would have to concede that doormen primarily provide personal services such as carrying bags and accepting deliveries, which seems far less socially acceptable.
Andrew Strom
Jackson Heights, N.Y.

•

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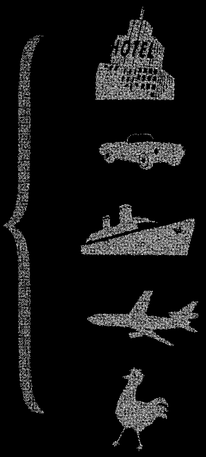

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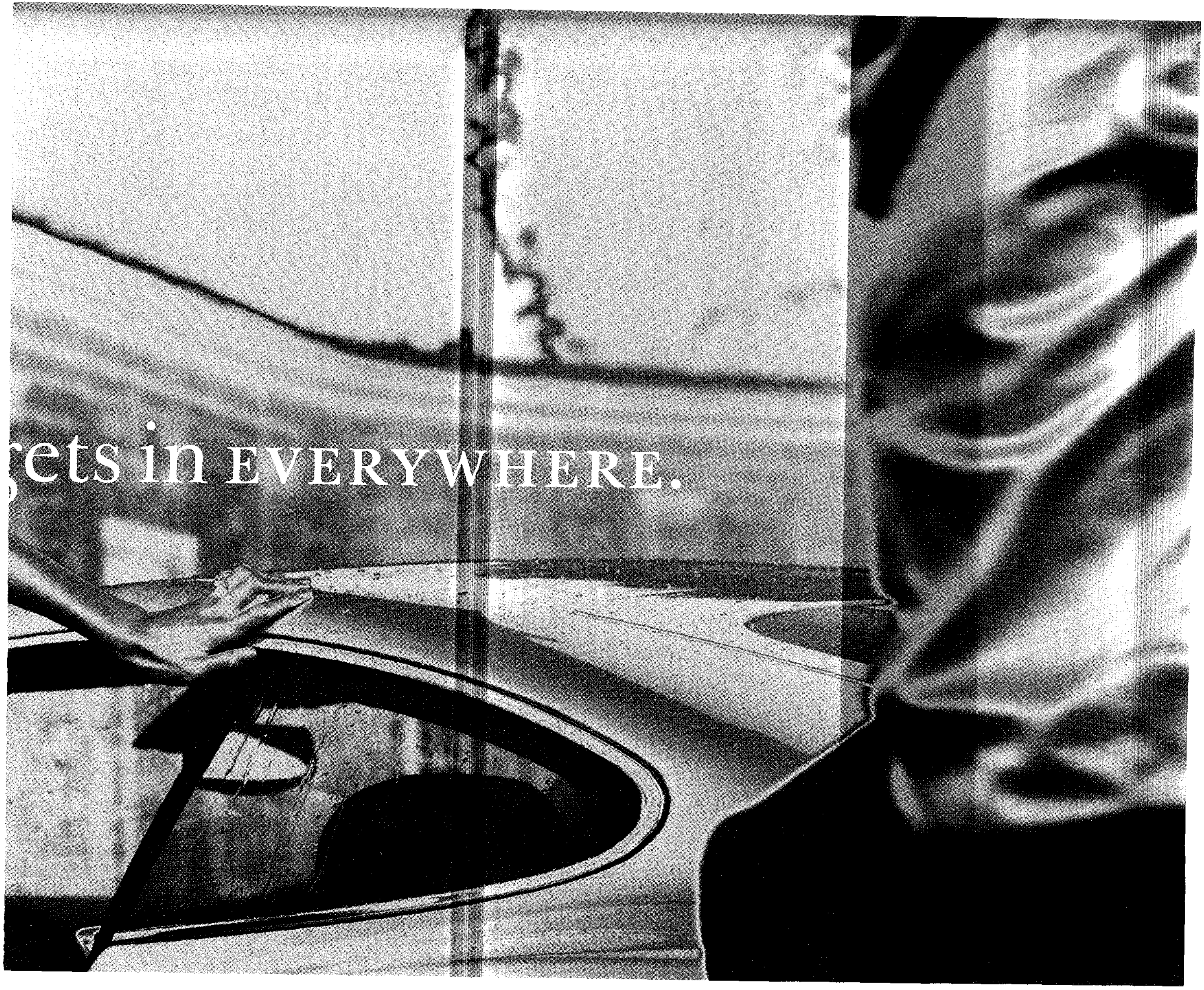
gets in EVERYWHERE.

Butterflies at the American Museum of Natural History. Photograph by Sylvia Plachy.

GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN

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THIS WEEK

THE THEATRE
OFF COLOR

Florence Foster Jenkins, a coloratura soprano with a terrible voice, used her money and her social connections to become an opera star, albeit of the novelty variety, in the mid-twentieth century; she recorded a series of so-bad-they're-good albums such as "Murder on the High Cs" and even sold out Carnegie Hall in 1944. "Souvenir," a play with music by Stephen Temperley about her life, begins previews this week. Judy Kaye plays Jenkins. (See page 12.)

NIGHT LIFE
MILESTONES

Since the late nineties, the young jazz pianist Robert Glasper has been playing in Brooklyn clubs and downtown dives as well as backing Q-Tip, Bilal, Mos Def, and other members of the hip-hop world. "Canvas," his first album on Blue Note, just came out, and this week he makes his début as a leader at the Village Vanguard. (See page 17.)

ART
REDON AND ON

The Ian Woodner Family Collection recently gave the Museum of Modern Art more than a hundred paintings, drawings, and prints by Odilon Redon (1840-1916), the surreal-leaning French artist who could make even a vase of flowers look ominous. The gift provides the occasion for a retrospective, "Beyond the Visible: The Art of Odilon Redon." (See page 18.)

CLASSICAL MUSIC
GLASS HOUSE

The Brooklyn Academy of Music, the scene of many Philip Glass triumphs, will host performances of the Symphonies No. 6 ("Plutonian Ode," set to an Allen Ginsberg poem) and No. 8, conducted by Dennis Russell Davies. (See page 25.)

MOVIES
LOST YOUTH

The Thalia Theatre, at Symphony Space, as part of its "Children in the 20th Century" series, will screen Vittorio De Sica's heartbreaking neorealist masterpiece from 1948, "The Bicycle Thief," about a poverty-stricken father whose bicycle is stolen on the first day of his first job in two years. (See page 32.)

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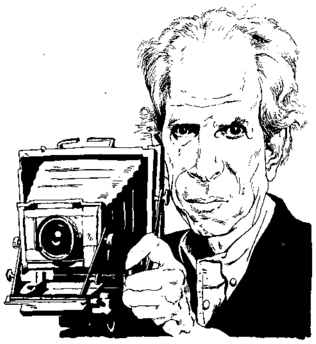
CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK
SHORE LEAVE

Stephen Shore was twenty-four and avid when he set off from New York on a cross-country road trip with the idea of photographing, in his words, "everyone I met, every meal, every toilet, every bed I slept in, the streets I walked on, the towns I visited." Shore's project began in March, 1972, and it ended twenty-one months later in Memphis, Tennessee, after stops in half of the states.



Shore edited the series down to several hundred small, commercially printed color photos and called it "American Surfaces"; in his terrific exhibition at P.S. 1, the bulk of them (two hundred and forty-three images) are on display for the first time since 1972. Looking at the pictures is like immersing yourself in a stranger's scrapbook, but in Shore's eyes, these people, these places, these plates of food are at once generic and iconic. His snapshots combine Pop art's celebration of the commonplace and Walker Evans's deadpan descriptiveness with a stoner's wonder—a coffee cup on wood-grain Formica or the dusty sole of a woman's bare foot is transformed into a casual epiphany.

—Vince Aletti

THE THEATRE
OPENINGS AND PREVIEWS

Please call the phone number listed with the theatre for timetables and ticket information.

ALMOST HEAVEN: THE SONGS OF JOHN DENVER
Randal Myler ("It Ain't Nothin' But the Blues") directs a new musical that features twenty-eight John Denver songs performed against a tableau of the late sixties and early seventies. In previews. (Promenade, 2162 Broadway, at 76th St. 212-239-6200.)

BACH AT LEIPZIG
In this play inspired by actual events and written by Itamar Moses, seven rival musicians fight to fill the post of organ master at Leipzig. Directed by Pam MacKinnon. In previews. (New York Theatre Workshop, 79 E. 4th St. 212-239-6200.)

CAMBODIA AGONISTES
Pan Asian Repertory Theatre launches its twenty-ninth season with a musical incorporating traditional Cambodian dance and masks, in which a blind Cambodian dancer in New York reflects on her home country's civil war and genocide. Opens Nov. 2. (West End, 263 W. 86th St. 212-279-4200.)

HAMLET
Michael Cumpsty takes the title role and reunites with the director Brian Kulick. In previews. (Classic Stage Company, 136 E. 13th St. 212-677-4210.)

JERSEY BOYS
A new musical about how Frankie Valli and the other members of the Four Seasons came up from blue-collar roots to form the successful pop group. Directed by Des McAnuff, with music by Bob Gaudio, book by Marshall Brickman and Rick Elice, and lyrics by Bob Crewe. In previews. Opens Nov. 6. (August Wilson, 245 W. 52nd St. 212-239-6200.)

MR. MARMALADE
The Roundabout Theatre Company presents the New York première of Noah Haidle's comedy about adult behavior, as seen through the eyes of clever, acerbic children. Directed by Michael Greif. The cast includes Michael C. Hall ("Six Feet Under"). In previews. (Laura Pels, 111 W. 46th St. 212-719-1300.)

THE RUBY SUNRISE
The artistic director of the Public, Oskar Eustis, directs this play by Rinne Groff, about an inventor named Ruby, who is trying to develop an electrical television, and her daughter, a television producer who tries to tell her mother's story twenty years later. In previews. (Public, 425 Lafayette St. 212-239-6200.)

SEASCAPE
Edward Albee's Pulitzer Prize-winning play, about two couples who meet on a beach and contemplate life, death, and consciousness. With George Grizzard, Elizabeth Marvel, Frances Sternhagen, and Frederick Weller. In previews. (Booth, 222 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.)

SOUVENIR
In a play with music by Stephen Temperley, Judy Kaye stars as Florence Foster Jenkins, an infamously bad classical-music singer who sold out Carnegie Hall in the nineteen-forties. In previews. (Lyceum, 149 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.)

SWEENEY TODD
The innovatively staged revival of Stephen Sondheim's musical thriller from 1979 comes to Broadway by way of London. John Doyle's production stars Michael Cerveris ("Assassins") as the vengeful barber and Patti LuPone as his co-conspirator. In previews. Opens Nov. 3. (Eugene O'Neill, 230 W. 49th St. 212-239-6200.)

THE WINTER'S TALE
Edward Hall directs the all-male British acting troupe Propeller in this rendition of Shakespeare's comical fairy tale. Nov. 2-6. (BAM Harvey Theatre, 651 Fulton St., Brooklyn. 718-636-4100.)

THE WOMAN IN WHITE
Andrew Lloyd Webber's new musical, adapted from Wilkie Collins's Victorian thriller, about an art tutor and his two pupils, all of whom are the victims of a crime committed by a mysterious woman. In previews. (Marquis, 1535 Broadway, 212-307-4100.)

NOW PLAYING

ABSURD PERSON SINGULAR
Alan Ayckbourn's 1973 hit has been revived by the Manhattan Theatre Club, under the skillful direction of John Tillinger. The play, which exposes a bevy of oafish, parochial, bourgeois narcissists, takes place in three kitchens over a series of three successive Christmas parties, in daft suburban England, beginning in the upwardly mobile household of Sidney (Alan Ruck) and Jane (the excellent Clea Lewis), as Jane manically polishes the surfaces of her prefab kitchen. Ayckbourn is expert at constructing funny stage pictures, but the play itself is stale, and the nuanced tableau of British snobbery is mostly lost on an American audience. Even for a bromide, "Absurd Person Singular" is weak stuff. (Reviewed in our issue of 10/31/05.) (Biltmore, 261 W. 47th St. 212-239-6200.)

ASHLEY MONTANA GOES ASHORE IN THE CAICOS . . . OR WHAT AM I DOING HERE?
The author Roger Rosenblatt brings his mercurial, peppery wit to the task of anatomizing the current cultural mood. The resulting field guide to absurdity is nailed by the cast of four pros (Bebe Neuwirth, Jeffrey DeMunn, Jenn Harris, and James Waterston), who exchange wry observations and even hazard a torch song to John Ashcroft. The actors expertly deliver rapid-fire vignettes about television news, Michael D. Brown's post-FEMA career options—a piano bar in New Orleans—and, of course, the eponymous Ashley Montana, a *Sports Illustrated* swimsuit model whose curvy, enhanced image is a kind of emblem of the age's inanity. Sharply directed by Jim Simpson. (The Flea, 41 White St. 212-352-3101.)

BEOWULF
The Irish Rep's musical version of the eighth-century epic poem has operatic aspirations, an overflowing score by the "Saturday Night Live" musical director Lenny Pickett, and a cast of seven men, dolled up in togas, whose pure voices resound handsomely in the small house. Nonetheless, the production is an odd mix of clashing elements, including church-basement pageantry, an ethereal Celtic harpist, sword fights with "Forbidden Planet"-style monsters, and some striking puppetry, including a wonderful crocodile with clacking jaws. For all the imagination on display, the director, Charlotte Moore, hasn't quite assembled the pieces into a coherent whole, or given us a sense of why this particular epic is still relevant. (132 W. 22nd St. 212-727-2737.)

FIVE COURSE LOVE
Gregg Coffin's new musical is packed with variety-show schlock. Heather Ayers and John Bolton play five courting couples and Jeff Gurner plays their waiter at five ill-starred dinners. In quick succession, the actors sing for their suppers at a barbecue joint (a blind date between nerd and nympho), a trattoria (a tawdry Mafia tryst), a German *Speiseplatz* (a Teutonic S & M threesome), a Spanish cantina (Zorro meets Rosalinda), and a "Happy Days"-style burger joint. The game cast have strong, appealing voices and make the best of Coffin's goofy skits, but "Five Course Love" fails to satisfy. (Minetta Lane Theatre, 18 Minetta Lane. 212-307-4100.)

IN MY LIFE
A romance between a musician with Tourette's syndrome and an obsessive-compulsive journalist is the subject of this new musical written and directed by Joseph Brooks, the composer of the pop ballad "You Light Up My Life." (Music Box, 239 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.)

THE INVISIBLE MAN
The Aquila Theatre Company collaborates with the choreographer Doug Varone to present a theatre-and-dance collaboration based on H. G. Wells's classic novel. (Baruch Performing Arts Center, 25th St. between Lexington and Third Aves. 212-279-4200. Through Nov. 6.)

KARLA
In his first play, presented by Caney Creek Productions and directed by Bruce Kronenberg, the country singer-songwriter Steve Earle examines the story of Karla Faye Tucker (Jodie Markell), who committed a double homicide and then embraced Christi-

ANDY FRIEDMAN

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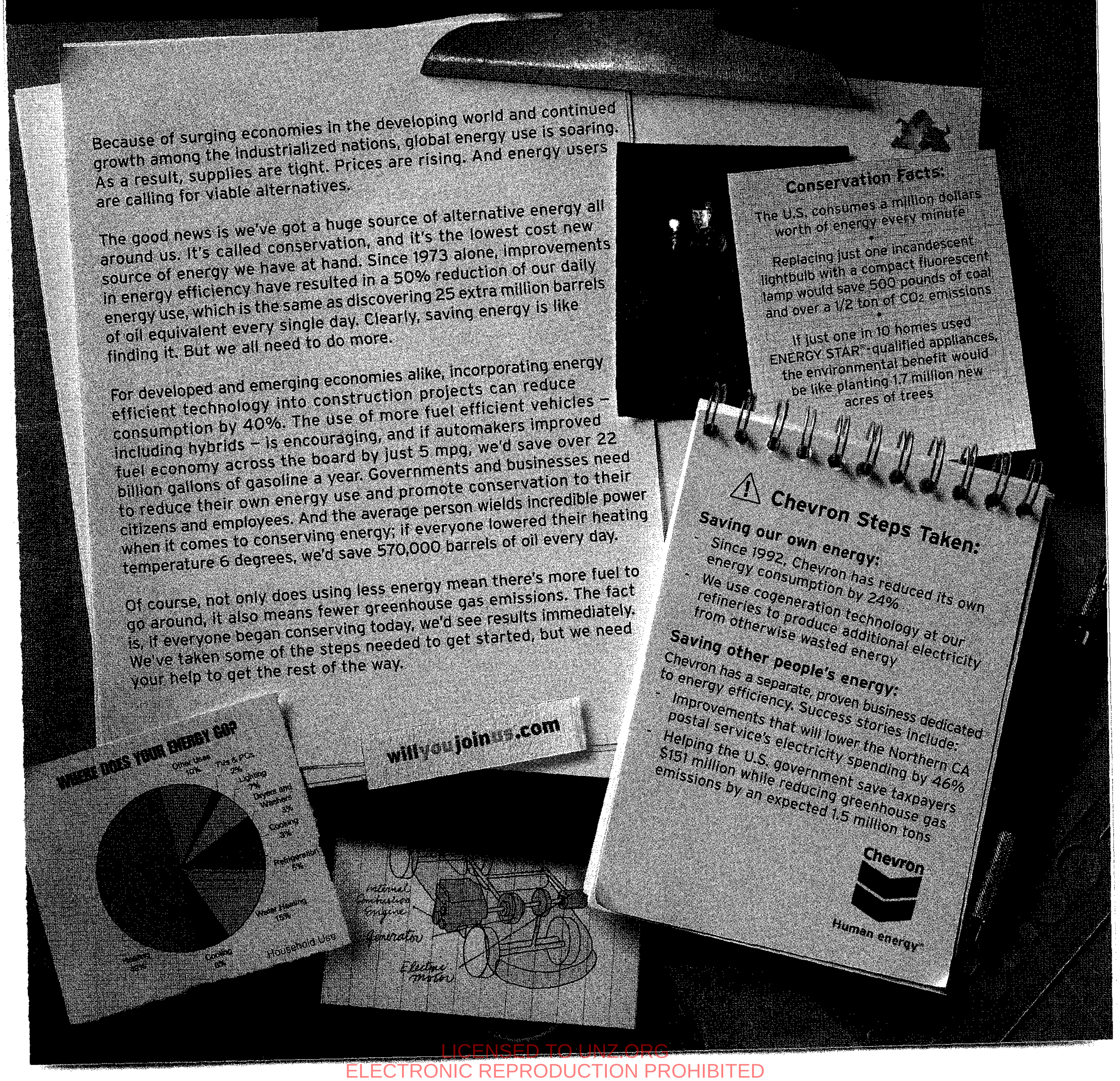

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For developed and emerging economies alike, incorporating energy efficient technology into construction projects can reduce consumption by 40%. The use of more fuel efficient vehicles – including hybrids – is encouraging, and if automakers improved fuel economy across the board by just 5 mpg, we'd save over 22 billion gallons of gasoline a year. Governments and businesses need to reduce their own energy use and promote conservation to their citizens and employees. And the average person wields incredible power when it comes to conserving energy; if everyone lowered their heating temperature 6 degrees, we'd save 570,000 barrels of oil every day.

Of course, not only does using less energy mean there's more fuel to go around, it also means fewer greenhouse gas emissions. The fact is, if everyone began conserving today, we'd see results immediately. We've taken some of the steps needed to get started, but we need your help to get the rest of the way.

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anity on death row. Earle, a vocal opponent of capital punishment, depicts each character tenderly and without pushing politics. However, the play's structure, a series of purgatorial reckonings following Karla's execution, is limiting, and her spiritual rehabilitation is so fully established at the play's outset that it blunts the drama. (The Culture Project, 45 Bleecker St. 212-352-3101.)

LATINOLOGUES
Cheech Marin directs four actors (including the show's creator, Rick Najera, and the gifted Mexican comedian Eugenio Derbez) in a cycle of Hispanic-themed character sketches. The roles, which range from a womanizing busboy to a Puerto Rican Day Parade beauty queen who refuses to give up her crown, are little more than mouthpieces for broad standup humor and tend to employ stock ethnic stereotypes. Since the Latino experience is so vastly underrepresented on Broadway, the show is able to coast on the cravings of its audience—but a richer set of characterizations might have better filled the void. (Helen Hayes, 240 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200.)

MANIC FLIGHT REACTION
Playwrights Horizons presents a new comedy by Sarah Schulman, about a woman whose daughter discovers her past affair with a current Presidential candidate's wife. The cast includes Deirdre O'Connell and Molly Price. (416 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200.)

A MOTHER, A DAUGHTER AND A GUN
Olympia Dukakis, Veanne Cox, and George S. Irving star in a new comedy by Barra Grant, about the emotional relationship between mothers and daughters. Jonathan Lynn ("My Cousin Vinny") directs. (Dodger Stages, 340 W. 50th St. 212-239-6200.)

A NAKED GIRL ON THE APPIAN WAY
In a new Roundabout production, the playwright Richard Greenberg's distinctly American age phobia dovetails with his fear of women: he believes, it seems, that once a woman is no longer "pretty," she becomes a wreck of negative feelings. It is those feelings that Bess (Jill Clayburgh), a cookbook author and mother of three racially diverse, adopted, now adult children, tries to keep at bay. Greenberg wants "Appian Way" to show us that nothing in upper-middle-class life appears to be what it is. But, although the actors—particularly Clayburgh—give the production their all, the cacophony of one-liners and the rush of secrets exposed in the last minutes make this fast-paced show a rather shallow experience. (10/17/05) (American Airlines Theatre, 227 W. 42nd St. 212-719-1300.)

NORMAL
The Transport Group presents a musical about a family dealing with a daughter suffering from an eating disorder. The cast includes Barbara Walsh ("Hairspray"), Adam Heller, and Erin Leigh Peck. With book by Yvonne Adrian, lyrics by Cheryl Stern, and music by Tom Kochan. Jack Cummings III directed. (Connelly, 220 E. 4th St. 212-352-3101.)

THE ODD COUPLE
Neil Simon's classic play stars Nathan Lane as the slovenly sportswriter Oscar Madison and Matthew Broderick as the fastidious photographer Felix Ungar. (Reviewed in this issue.) (Brooks Atkinson, 256 W. 47th St. 212-307-4100.)

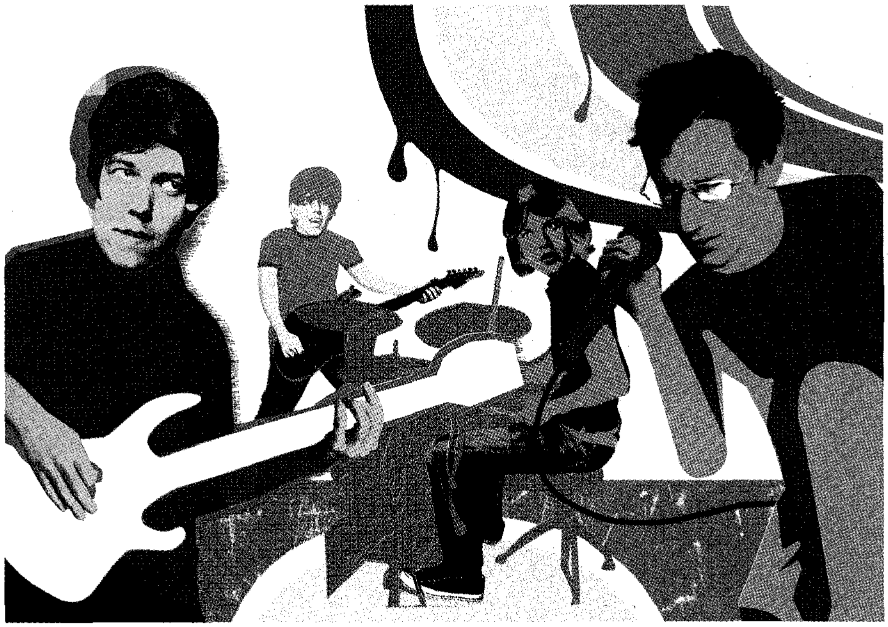
ON SECOND AVENUE
The Folksbiene Yiddish Theatre opens its ninety-first season with a revival of this spring's hit, a musical review by Zalmen Moltek and Moishe Rosenfeld, starring Mike Burstyn, about the heyday of New York's Yiddish theatre, from the late nineteenth century to the nineteen-thirties. (J.C.C., 334 Amsterdam Ave. 212-230-6200.)

SEE WHAT I WANNA SEE
A new musical at the Public by Michael John LaChiusa ("The Wild Party"), loosely based on the short stories of Ryunosuke Akutagawa, tells contemporary New York tales of loss and hope. The ensemble cast includes Idina Menzel and Mary Testa. Directed by Ted Sperling. (425 Lafayette St. 212-239-6200.)

SLUT
The title of this former Fringe Festival hit turns out to be an equal-opportunity term; it refers to a guy named Adam (Andy Karl), who embarks on a mission to sleep with one girl from every country on the globe. Meanwhile, his more timid friend, Dan (Jim Stanek), and Delia (Jenn Colella), an East Village rocker, wrestle with the vagaries of love and debauchery. The musical, written by Ben H. Winters and Stephen Sislen, isn't all that raunchy or subversive—in fact, it's surprisingly wholesome. Still, Gordon Greenberg's snappy direction teases out the script's clever moments. (A.T.A. Theatre, 314 W. 54th St. 212-239-6200.)

A SOLDIER'S PLAY
In Charles Fuller's 1981 Pulitzer Prize-winning melodrama, set on an Army base in Louisiana in 1944 and directed by Jo Bonney, Private C. J. Memphis (Mike Colter) is a superstitious, happy-go-lucky black recruit from rural Mississippi whom the sadistic black Sergeant Vernon Waters (James McDaniel) frames for murder in order to get him out of his company. The play unfolds in flashback, told by the play's eloquent narrator, Captain Richard Davenport (Taye Diggs), who unravels the mystery as he interviews the members of Waters's platoon. But the notional characters are given only a wash of personality and psychology, and the casting is uneven. The actors are proficient, but there's no chemistry between the antagonists, and the stage-managed situation fails to sizzle. (10/31/05) (Second Stage, 307 W. 43rd St. 212-246-4422.)

THIRD
Wendy Wasserstein's new play, about a college professor who accuses a student of plagiarism. (Reviewed in this issue.) (Mitzi E. Newhouse, Lincoln Center. 212-239-6200.)



The young Los Angeles rock band the Mae Shi plays Northsix on November 3.

JOHN RITTER

Also Playing

ALTAR BOYZ: Dodger Stages, 340 W. 50th St. 212-239-6200. **AVENUE Q:** Golden, 252 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **CHICAGO:** Ambassador, 219 W. 49th St. 212-239-6200. **CHITTY CHITTY BANG BANG:** Hilton, 213 W. 42nd St. 212-307-4100. **CYCLING PAST THE MATTERHORN:** Clurman, 410 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200. (Through Nov. 6.) **DIRTY ROTTEN SCOUNDRELS:** Imperial, 249 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **DOUBT:** Walter Kerr, 219 W. 48th St. 212-239-6200. **FIDDLER ON THE ROOF:** Minskoff, 200 W. 45th St. 212-307-4100. **FOOLS IN LOVE:** Manhattan Ensemble Theatre, 55 Mercer St. 212-239-6200. **FORBIDDEN BROADWAY: SPECIAL VICTIMS UNIT:** 47th Street Theatre, 304 W. 47th St. 212-239-6200. **THE GREAT AMERICAN TRAILER PARK MUSICAL:** Dodger Stages, 340 W. 50th St. 212-239-6200. **HAIRSPRAY:** Neil Simon, 250 W. 52nd St. 212-307-4100. **THE LIGHT IN THE PIAZZA:** Vivian Beaumont, Lincoln Center. 212-239-6200. **MAMMA MIA!:** Winter Garden, Broadway at 50th St. 212-239-6200. **MONTY PYTHON'S SPAMALOT:** Shubert, 225 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200. **MOVIN' OUT:** Richard Rodgers, 226 W. 46th St. 212-307-4100. **ONE-MAN STAR WARS TRILOGY:** Lamb's Theatre, 130 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200. **ORSON'S SHADOW:** Barrow Street Theatre, 27 Barrow St. 212-239-6200. **SWEET CHARITY:** Al Hirschfeld, 302 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **THOM PAIN (BASED ON NOTHING):** DR2, 103 E. 15th St. 212-239-6200. **THE 25TH ANNUAL PUTNAM COUNTY SPELLING BEE:** Circle in the Square, 50th St. between Broadway and Eighth Ave. 212-239-6200. **WALKING DOWN BROADWAY:** 311 W. 43rd St. 212-315-0231. (Through Nov. 6.) **WAR IN PARAMUS:** Abingdon Theatre Arts Complex, 312 W. 36th St. 212-864-4444. (Through Nov. 6.) **WICKED:** Gershwin, 222 W. 51st St. 212-307-4100.

NIGHT LIFE
ROCK AND POP

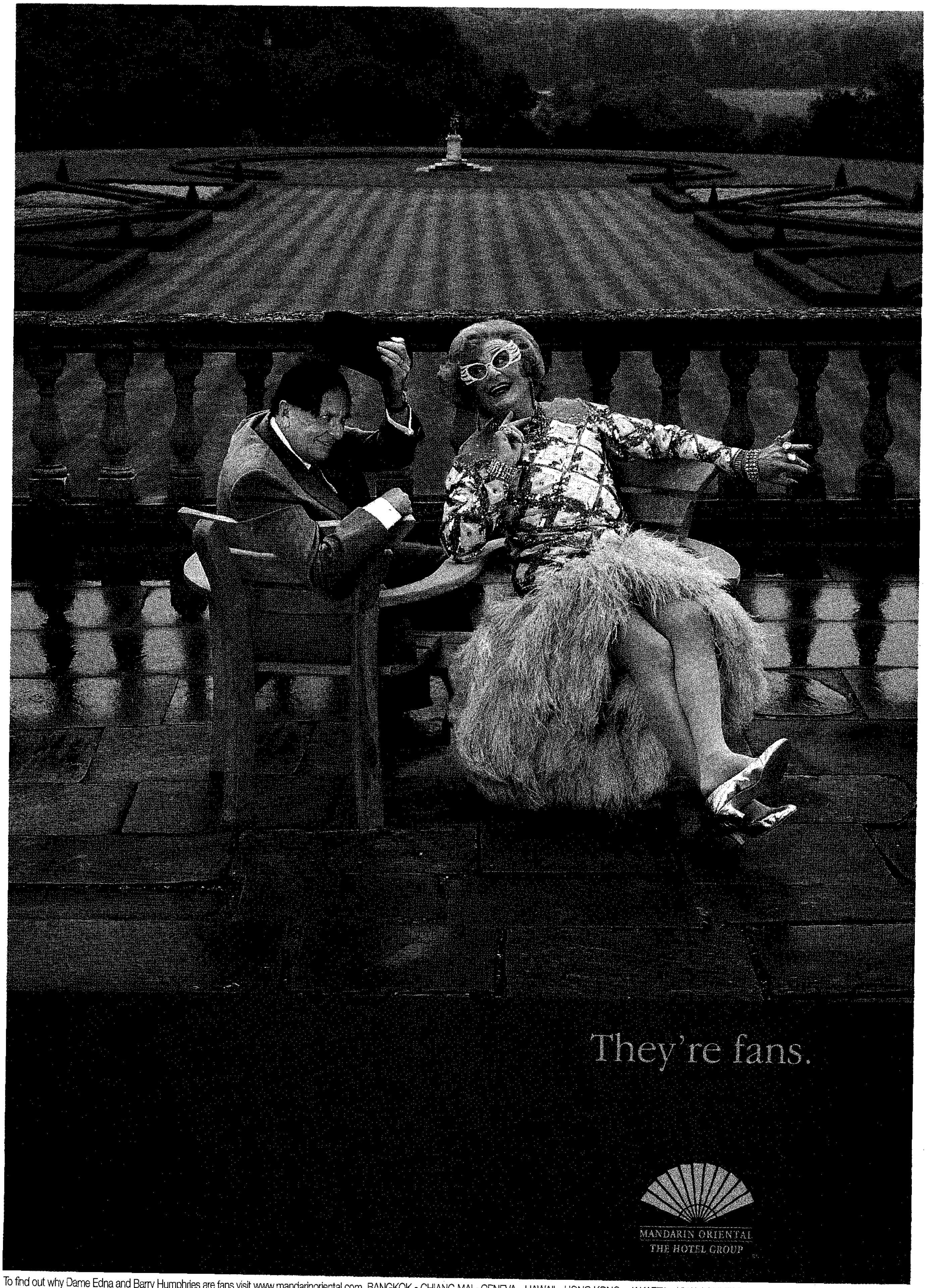
Musicians and night-club proprietors live complicated lives; it's advisable to call ahead to confirm engagements.

B. B. KING BLUES CLUB & GRILL
237 W. 42nd St. (212-997-4144)—Nov. 3-4: In recent years, the great soul singer **Al Green** has been back in the studio with his seventies producer Willie Mitchell, resulting in the albums "I Can't Stop," from 2003, and this year's "Everything's OK." Nov. 6: In the wrong hands, the electric blues consists of flat, lachrymose lyrics and endless solos. The **Robert Cray Band** has been injecting fresh ideas and passion into the genre for more than two decades, with Cray's impressive singing, strong songwriting, and love of earthy soul. Nov. 8: The rock *en español* of **Jarabe de Palo.**

BOWERY BALLROOM
6 Delancey St. (212-533-2111)—Nov. 2-3: The young British singer-songwriter **James Blunt** delivers swooning ballads that spill over with declarations of unrequited love. His début album, "Back to Bedlam," is a balm for the lovelorn. Nov. 4: The **Shout Out Louds,** an energetic quartet from Stockholm who feel no shame in wearing their heart on their sleeve. With the **Essex Green,** a little band that makes the pop sounds of yesterday available today.

CANAL ROOM
285 West Broadway (212-941-8100)—Nov. 5: **Linda Perry,** the yodelling front woman for the nineties outfit 4 Non Blondes, found a second act working with teen-pop divas like Pink and Christina Aguilera. Her confidence rekindled by those successes, Perry is out on the road as a solo artist.

HIRO BALLROOM
The Maritime Hotel, 371 W. 16th St. (212-727-0212)—Nov. 3: **Elbow,** a fine band from Manches-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Photographs of Paris streetlamps by Charles Marville (1816-79), at Howard Greenberg.

ter anchored by the mournful vocalist Guy Garvey, plays expansive pop that evokes lush, rainy dreamscapes. Their début album, "Asleep in the Back," tackled the themes of small-town desperation and substance abuse and garnered a Mercury Prize nomination in 2001. Their latest release, "Leaders of the Free World," mixes the personal and the political in a highly compelling fashion.

IRVING PLAZA

17 Irving Pl., at 15th St. (212-777-6800)—Nov. 3: The gritty Texan singer-songwriter **Robert Earl Keen.** Nov. 7: **Institute** is led by the anguished singer Gavin Rossdale, formerly of the British band Bush. Nov. 8: **Fear Factory,** which started out in the early nineties, was one of the first bands to join heavy metal with industrial rock. Their latest album, "Transgression," doesn't deviate from the formula, although it includes an unlikely and surprisingly faithful cover of U2's hit "I Will Follow."

MADISON SQUARE GARDEN

Seventh Ave. at 33rd St. (212-307-7171)—Nov. 3: **Nine Inch Nails's** front man, Trent Reznor, took the noisy approach of bands like Ministry and Skinny Puppy and added huge pop hooks and superior production—a combination that brought the band to the forefront of alternative rock. Reznor is now one of the genre's elder statesmen, but to judge by the band's latest album, "With Teeth," he hasn't mellowed with age.

MERCURY LOUNGE

217 E. Houston St. (212-260-4700)—Nov. 3: **Vic Thrill & the Saturn Missile** is an eccentric local act that eludes categorization with giddy dexterity. Their frantic, psychedelic songs are rife with jittery rhythms and strange electronic instrumentation. Nov. 7: **David Garza,** an Irving, Texas, native and an endlessly inventive singer-songwriter, sings torch songs, confessionals, and straight-ahead pop numbers that are quite unlike anything else out there.

NORTHSIX

66 N. 6th St., Williamsburg, Brooklyn (718-599-5103)—Nov. 3: The local experimental three-piece electro-rock band **Parts & Labor.** With the **Mae Shi,** a slightly chaotic spaz-rock band from L.A. that writes compact songs (one clocks in at ten seconds). The longer ones switch between a spare electronic sound and dense rock with Midwestern overtones, often in under two and a half minutes. Nov. 5: The **Fiery Furnaces,** fresh from an appearance at Town Hall, return to more modest quarters. The eclectic, prolific indie-rock band topped critics' lists nationwide with its last album, "Blueberry Boat." For a follow-up, the band—led by the siblings Matthew and Eleanor Friedberger—is releasing two albums in quick succession, the first of which is "Rehearsing My Choir," a strange and sprawling concept album with major vocal support by the Friedbergers' grandmother Olga Sarantos.

RADIO CITY MUSIC HALL

Sixth Ave. at 50th St. (212-247-4777)—Nov. 7: The North Carolina native **Ben Folds,** formerly of the guitarless alternative-rock trio Ben Folds Five. His most recent album, "Songs for Silverman," covers fatherhood and failed relationships and includes a tribute to the late rock icon Elliott Smith.

ROXY

515 W. 18th St.—Nov. 6: The surrealistic punk-cabaret band **Gogol Bordello,** led by the sallow-faced, darkly charismatic Eugene Hutz (who appeared recently in the big-screen adaptation of "Everything Is Illuminated") caps the New York Gypsy Festival. With the **Hungry March Band, Zlatne Uste,** and the Clarinet All-Stars, featuring **Husnu Senlendirici, Ismail Lumanovski,** and **Lefteris Bournias.** (For information about the festival, call 212-203-3625, or visit www.nygypsyfest.com.)

SATALLA

37 W. 26th St. (212-576-1155)—Nov. 2: The Australian singer-songwriter **Eric Bogle.** Later on Nov. 2: The hardworking blues harpist **Rod Piazza** carries on the legacy of his mentor, George (Harmonica) Smith. Piazza toured extensively with the former Muddy Waters sideman in the seventies (their double-harmonica outfit was called Bacon Fat), and he has the cool and confident stage presence that comes from years of experience. Plus, he looks like he's really enjoying himself. Piazza's band, the Mighty Flyers, includes his wife, Honey, on keyboards. Nov. 3: A night of bluegrass with the singer and multi-instrumentalist **Tim O'Brien.** Nov. 5-6: The noted Brazilian vocalist **Joyce** and the composer and guitarist **Dori Caymmi.**

WEBSTER HALL

125 E. 11th St. (212-353-1600)—Nov. 2: The British outfit the **Go! Team** shrewdly mixes early hip-hop, surf rock, and myriad other styles into a music that's almost impossible not to dance to. The band's album, "Thunder, Lightning, Strike," was a critics' favorite at home last year (it was nominated for a Mercury Prize). It's taken some time for the disk to make it to our shores, but it was worth the wait. Nov. 5-6: The **Super Furry Animals,** out of Cardiff, Wales, started their career two decades ago singing in Welsh, but they converted to English and have since conquered the U.K. music market. The band's neo-psychedelic art rock was once so broad-reaching that it bordered on the absurd. Their more recent work, including the newly released album "Love Kraft," plays it straight enough to create cross-generational appeal.

WORLD MUSIC INSTITUTE

This week the institute presents the Mahrajan Al-Fan Festival of Arab Arts (see Above and Beyond). **Sonia M'Barek,** a Tunisian vocalist famed in the Arabic world for her take on *maluf*, traditional Tunisian court music, makes her New York City début at Symphony Space (Broadway at 95th St.) on Nov. 5. She'll be joined by **Simon Shaheen,** a tireless ambassador of Arabic music, and his Near Eastern Music Ensemble. (For more information, call 212-545-7536.)

JAZZ AND STANDARDS

ALGONQUIN HOTEL

59 W. 44th St. (212-840-6800)—Through Nov. 5: The West Coast vocalist **Paula West.**

BIRDLAND

315 W. 44th St. (212-581-3080)—Nov. 2-5: Last year, the gifted jazz vocalist **Karrin Allyson** took a

sentimental journey on her album "Wild for You," recasting pop classics by Elton John, Carly Simon, Carole King, and other singer-songwriters from the seventies.

BLUE NOTE
131 W. 3rd St., near Sixth Ave. (212-475-8592)—Nov. 1-6: Although **Clark Terry** often claims that the golden years "suck," the cunning brassman and sometimes gibberish-speaking vocalist keeps on performing; the singer **Mary Stallings** is his guest here.

IRIDIUM
1650 Broadway, at 51st St. (212-582-2121)—Nov. 3-6: The funky side of smooth jazz is exposed when the keyboardist **Alex Bugnon** performs. Mondays belong to the electric-guitar innovator **Les Paul.** The **Mingus Big Band** takes over on Tuesdays.

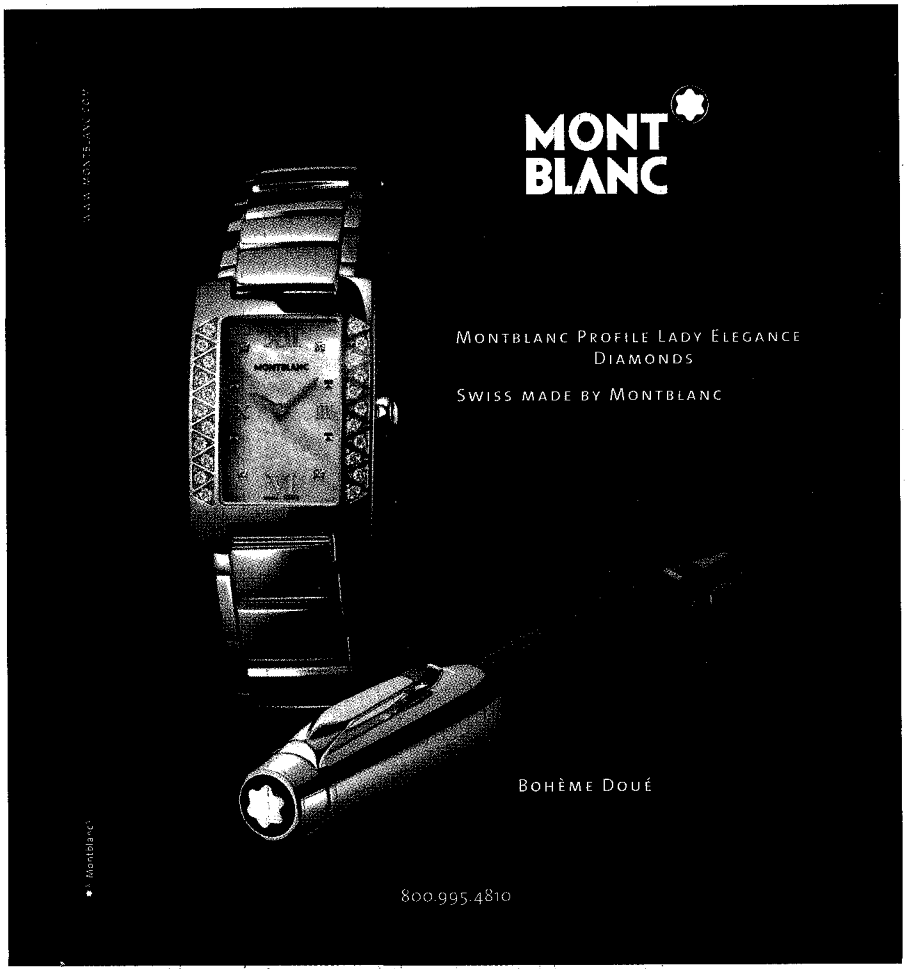
JAZZ GALLERY
290 Hudson St., near Spring St. (212-242-1063)—**Marcus Gilmore** has superior genes for a drummer: his maternal grandfather is the percussion legend Roy Haynes. The nineteen-year-old, making his début here as a bandleader on Nov. 5, has already played with Nicholas Payton, Jimmy Heath, and Vijay Iyer.

JAZZ STANDARD
116 E. 27th St. (212-576-2232)—The pianist and composer **Jason Lindner,** who has managed to keep his scrappy big band together for a decade, celebrates its tenth anniversary Nov. 2-3. The soloists include **Anat Cohen,** on saxophone, and her brother **Avishai,** on trumpet. Nov. 4-6: The **Gary Bartz** quartet. A comer from the glory days of the late sixties, the saxophonist Bartz spent the better part of the nineties reëstablishing his mastery and a solid commitment to straight-ahead swing. On an inspired night, when he feels like parading his harmonic knowledge, Bartz can be staggering.

VILLAGE VANGUARD
178 Seventh Ave. S., at 11th St. (212-255-4037)—Nov. 1-6: Like Jason Moran, Ethan Iverson, and the rest of the new breed of highly touted jazz pianists, **Robert Glasper** takes an inclusive approach. His major-label début album, "Canvas," finds him in the company of open-minded musicians (the bassist **Vicente Archer** and the drummer **Damion Reid,** who join him here). They incorporate pungent elements of hip-hop, fusion, and fractured bop. The **Vanguard Jazz Orchestra** holds sway on Mondays.

ART
MUSEUMS AND LIBRARIES

METROPOLITAN MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 82nd St. (212-535-7710)—**"Fra Angelico"** presents some seventy-five ravishing paintings, drawings, and illuminated manuscripts by the fifteenth-century Tuscan artist, as well as additional works by his assistants and followers. Through Jan. 29. ♦ **"Vincent van Gogh: The Drawings."** Through Dec. 31. ♦ **"Santiago Calatrava: Sculpture Into Architecture."** Through March 5. ♦ The city built by Holy Roman Emperor Charles IV as "the dream of delirious architects" to rival Paris and Rome lends treasures from its heyday in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. **"Prague: The Crown of Bohemia, 1347-1437"** is populated with many apple-cheeked Madonnas, who share gallery space with illuminated books, brocaded tapestries, amethyst vessels, rock-crystal reliquaries, and stone statuary from Karlstejn Castle and St. Vitus Cathedral. Through Jan. 3. ♦ The pre-Photoshop images in **"The Perfect Medium: Photography and the Occult"** purportedly depicted ghosts, spirit writing, ectoplasm, and the like. Through Dec. 31. ♦ **"Sol LeWitt on the Roof: Splotches, Whirls, and Twirls."** An installation in the roof garden, featuring five spiky stalagmite sculptures and a wall drawing. Through Oct. 30. ♦ The centerpiece of **"The Art of Medicine in Ancient Egypt"** is a fifteen-foot papyrus (ca. 1650-1550 B.C.), on loan from the New York Academy of Medicine, explaining the diagnosis and treatment of wounds to the head, neck, and shoulders by means both scientific and magical. Ointment jars, statues of healing gods, imple-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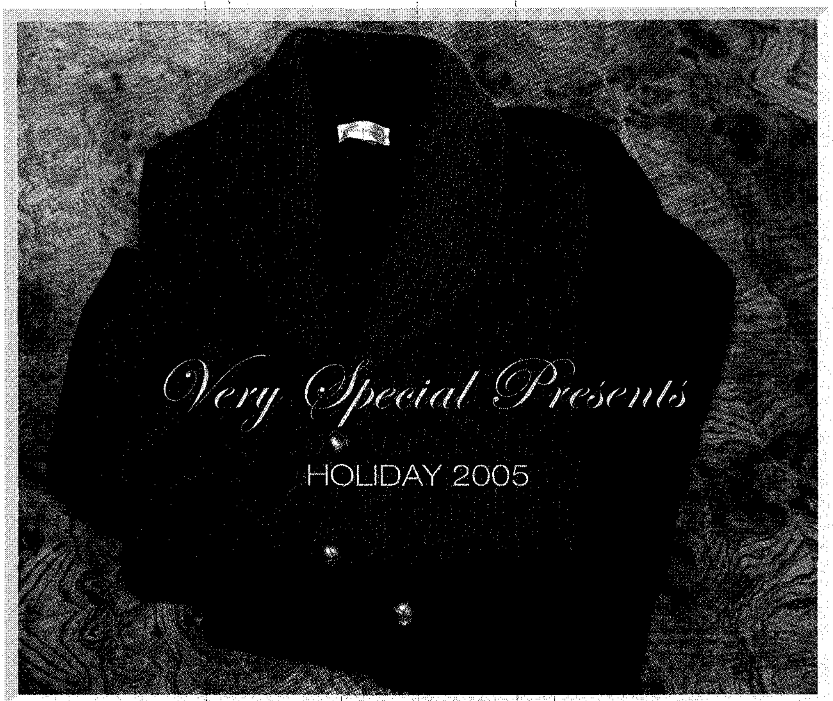
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ments, and mummies are also on view. Through Jan. 15. ♦ The Costume Institute presents **"Rara Avis: Selections from the Iris Barrel Apfel Collection."** Through Jan. 22. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 9:30 to 5:30, and Friday and Saturday evenings until 9.)

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART
11 W. 53rd St. (212-708-9400)—**"Beyond the Visible: The Art of Odilon Redon,"** a retrospective of work by the French symbolist (1840-1916) centered on a gift of more than a hundred works from the Ian Woodner Family Collection. Through Jan. 23. ♦ The retrospective exhibition **"Elizabeth Murray"** includes many of the shaped and splintered canvases covered with energizing color combinations for which the artist is best known. In the second-floor galleries, a selection of Murray's prints adapt similar techniques to paper. Through Jan. 9. ♦ **"Stillness: Michael Snow/Sam Taylor Wood,"** a small show of intimately scaled photographs and video works. Through Nov. 28. ♦ **"SAFE: Design Takes on Risk."** Through Jan. 2. (Open Wednesdays through Mondays, 10:30 to 5:30, and Friday evenings until 8.)

GUGGENHEIM MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 89th St. (212-423-3500)—The sprawling exhibition **"Russia!"** includes most everything you might think could fit under that rubric: gilt religious icons dating from the Middle Ages, Renaissance-era Western European paintings from imperial collections, romanticized portraits of peasant life, socialist-realist propaganda, early modernist masterworks from the collections of industrialists, videos made just this year. Through Jan. 11. (Open Saturdays through Wednesdays, 10 to 5:45, and Fridays, 10 to 8.)

WHITNEY MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART
Madison Ave. at 75th St. (800-944-8639)—**"Raymond Pettibon."** These thirty-seven drawings are a trifle for Pettibon, the tip of the iceberg in a career that's produced books, films, and album covers, as well as drawings accompanied by stark, dissociative text. Representatives from most of the significant subcultures portrayed in Pettibon's work are here, though: the surfers gliding down ukiyo-e waves, the tragic-iconic baseball players, lonesome antiheroes and antiheroines inspired by pinups and comic books. (Sadly, the softhearted Gumby, whom Pettibon has described as an alter ego, is missing.) An animated film created from drawings recalls the drawn animations of William Kentridge but possesses little of their power. The glib voices accompanying the moving images are a sharp contrast to the ghostly, disembodied voice of the pictures, whose genuineness and authority are at the crux of Pettibon's art. Through Feb. 19. ♦ The retrospective **"Oscar Bluemner: A Passion for Color"** aims to reposition the painter (1867-1938) as a major figure. Through Feb. 12. ♦ **"Building and Breaking the Grid, 1962-2002."** Through Jan. 8. ♦ A small selection of paintings from the permanent collection, **"Still Life: A Vital Theme"** is tucked away in a side gallery on the fifth floor of the museum. The images of flowers on tables are mostly forgettable, but Edward Hopper's broody brown study of his own bedroom at home in Nyack surprises, with a portrait within the painting complicating the memento-mori idea of the *vanitas*. Through Jan. 15. ♦ **"The New City: Sub/Urbia in Recent Photography."** Through Jan. 15. (Open Wednesdays, Thursdays, and weekends, 11 to 6, and Fridays, 1 to 9.)

AMERICAN MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY
Central Park W. at 79th St. (212-769-5100)—**"Dinosaurs: Ancient Fossils, New Discoveries,"** a review of recent developments in the study of dinosaurs, provides insight into how the animals moved through their world. Through Jan. 8. ♦ **"The Butterfly Conservatory: Tropical Butterflies Alive in Winter"** is back for an eighth year. Through May 29. (Open daily, 10 to 5:45.)

DAHESH MUSEUM OF ART
580 Madison Ave., at 57th St. (212-759-0606)—**"The Legacy of Homer: Four Centuries of Art from the École Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts, Paris."** Gods and heroes from Mercury to Achilles are the predictable protagonists of these high-drama history paintings from the collection of one of France's leading art schools. The premier *objet* at the Dahesh (the show continues at Princeton University's art museum) is Jacques-Louis David's large-scale "Andromache Mourning Hector," a dramatically lit piece of theatre-on-canvas (usually on view at the Louvre) that underscores the academic—and neoclassic—bent of the show. For contrast, there are Honoré Daumier's hilarious lithographs, which make light of Homeric seriousness. "The Abduction of Helen" recasts the Trojan beauty as a scowling shrew—think Olive Oyl in a chiton, carrying a dandified, cigar-puffing Paris on her hip. Through Jan. 22. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 11 to 6.)

FRICK COLLECTION
1 E. 70th St. (212-288-0700)—Some one hundred paintings by the Netherlandish artist Hans Memling (ca. 1435-94) survive; of the thirty portraits, twenty are at the Frick for the exhibition **"Memling's Portraits."** Through Dec. 31. (Open Tuesdays through Saturdays, 10 to 6, and Sundays, 11 to 5.)

GROLIER CLUB
47 E. 60th St. (212-838-6690)—**"No Other Appetite: Sylvia Plath, Ted Hughes, and the Blood Jet of Poetry"** presents manuscripts, letters, photographs, and more from the poets' archives. Through Nov. 19. (Open Mondays through Saturdays, 10 to 5.)

INTERNATIONAL CENTER OF PHOTOGRAPHY
1133 Sixth Ave., at 43rd St. (212-857-0000)—**"André Kertész."** Through Nov. 27. (Open Tuesdays through Thursdays, and weekends, 10 to 6, and Fridays, 10 to 8.)

MUSEO DEL BARRIO
Fifth Ave. at 104th St. (212-831-7272)—**"The (S) Files/The Selected Files."** Many of the forty Latinos and Latin-Americans in this emerging-artist showcase take strong political tacks, though the issue-oriented art feels derivative at times. Globalization is a recurring theme, illustrated by Caraballo-Farman's videos of street venders working "in the cracks" of the global economy, or Michael D. Linares's photographs that show him stealing gum from Wal-Mart. The lingering effects of colonialism enter Milton Rosa-Ortiz's mobile made with glass collected on Guánica beach in Puerto Rico, which was invaded by the U.S. during the Spanish-American War. Others—like Richard Garet, who uses an iPod to reshuffle lines from the poems of the Uruguayan writer Mario Benedetti—explore the rich landscape of local culture. Through Jan. 29. (Open Wednesdays through Sundays, 11 to 5.)

NEUE GALERIE
1048 Fifth Ave., at 86th St. (212-628-6200)—**"Egon Schiele,"** an exhibition of a hundred and fifty paintings and drawings by the Austrian artist, who died in 1918, at the age of twenty-eight. Through Feb. 20. (Open Fridays, 11 to 9, and Saturdays through Mondays, 11 to 6.)

NEW-YORK HISTORICAL SOCIETY
170 Central Park W., at 77th St. (212-873-3400)—In 1703, forty-two per cent of all households in New York held slaves. The economic underpinnings of the international trade in slave labor made the Port of New York—the financial center of the New World—a natural hub for traffic in kidnapped Africans, while its bustling urban population also attracted freed persons and fugitives. In the nineteenth century, as abolitionist feeling grew, the city offered a forum to orators like William Lloyd Garrison and Frederick Douglass. **"Slavery in New York"** examines this history and much more, with an installation loaded with statistics and documents. Most effective are the audio renderings of letters, diary entries, and court proceedings detailing the daily lives of black and white New Yorkers caught up in the "peculiar institution." Through March 5. ♦ **"Nature and the American Vision."** Through Feb. 5. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 10 to 6.)

"PERFORMA05"
This extensive program of performance by visual artists is projected to be the first of a biannual series. Artists include Marina Abramović, Laurie Simmons, Christian Marclay, Jesper Just, Sislej Xhafa, Mary Jordan, Michelle Handelman, and Francis Alÿs, among many others. At venues around the city, from Nov. 3 to 21. For schedules, locations, and information on tickets and reservations, see www.performa-arts.org.

P.S. 1 CONTEMPORARY ART CENTER
22-25 Jackson Ave., at 46th Ave., Long Island City (718-784-2084)—**"Stephen Shore: American Surfaces."** Through Jan. 23. (Open Thursdays through Mondays, noon to 6.)

CLASSICAL NOTES
IMPERIAL INTERLUDES

The works of Alexander Glazunov (1865-1936) provided the perfect soundtrack for late imperial Russia: a society that depended on brilliant surfaces could readily appreciate a kind of music that shone with the lustre of a ruby in a tsar's crown. Glazunov's music doesn't have the emotional complexity of Tchaikovsky's, but it can be far more than a luxury item, as José Serebrier's new recording (Warner Classics) of the Symphony No. 8 in E-Flat Major proves. Serebrier, once Stokowski's protégé, has had an unusually serpentine career, without any major music directorships on his résumé. But his pacing of this symphony—which has at once a Brahmsian economy and a radiantly Russian energy—is unerring; perhaps no one has ever conducted Glazunov's music with more color and verve. The Royal Scottish National Orchestra, normally a reliable second-tier band, turns in an inspired performance.

Glazunov was hardly Sergei Rachmaninoff's favorite conductor: while in a drunken stupor, he led the famously botched première of the Symphony No. 1, which sent the traumatized younger composer into a three-year creative block. The First Piano Concerto is another early Rachmaninoff piece that has been unjustly ignored, if Leif Ove Andsnes's new recording with Antonio Pappano conducting the Berlin Philharmonic (EMI) is any guide. This is a trenchant, earnest piece very different from the sumptuous Second Concerto, which is also included.

No one had to worry about the integrity of Sergey Taneyev (1856-1915), the great mentor to Rachmaninoff, Scriabin, and Prokofiev; a teetotaler, a bachelor, and a contrapuntalist of Bachian calibre, he is the great mystery man of Russian music. The pianist Mikhail Pletnev's new album (Deutsche Grammophon) is a heroic effort to compensate for years of international neglect; he recruits a formidable crew (including the violinist Vadim Repin and the cellist Lynn Harrell), offering passionate, virtuosic, and seamlessly integrated performances of the Piano Quintet and the Piano Trio. The Quintet is especially persuasive: lasting almost forty-five minutes, it merges German technique and Russian lyricism into a towering edifice of sound.

—*Russell Platt*

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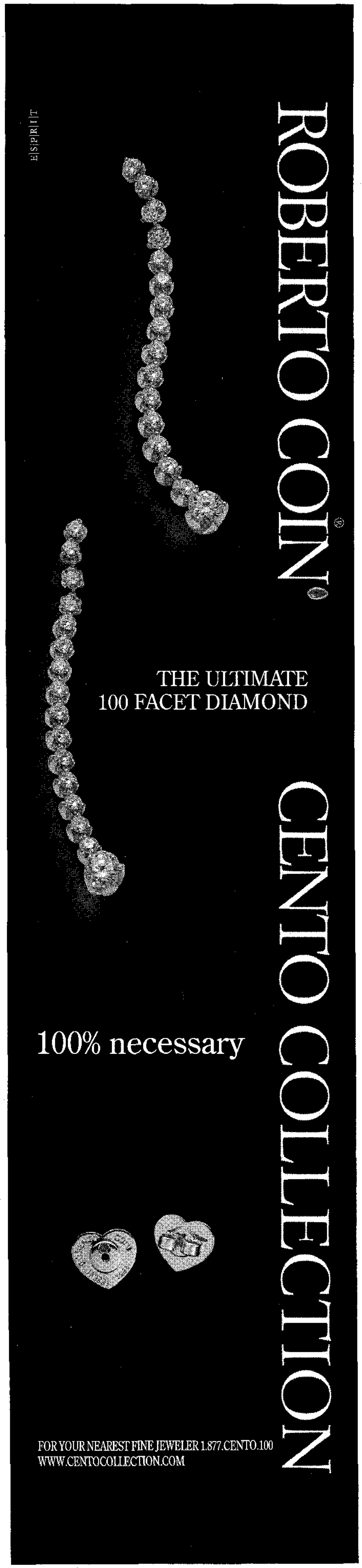

GALLERIES-UPTOWN

Galleries are usually open Tuesdays through Saturdays, from around 10 or 11 to between 5 and 6; please call the gallery for exact hours.

MIKE BIDLO
In 1953, Robert Rauschenberg procured a drawing from Willem de Kooning, which he promptly erased, turning the Expressionist master's image of a woman into a virtually mark-free, monochrome field. Rauschenberg described the stunt-cum-artwork as the "simultaneous unmaking of one work and the creation of another." Bidlo replicates the gesture by drawing his own de Koonings and erasing them. Is there much point in viewing the end product, or is *knowing* he's done it enough? Carefully matted and framed, they're actually quite lovely. And now that de Kooning is dead and Rauschenberg is eighty, Bidlo's act reads more as homage than as aggressive kill-the-fathers posturing. Two bell jars covering mounds of eraser detritus boost the memorial mood by functioning like funeral ashes. Through Nov. 11. (Naumann, 22 E. 80th St. 212-472-6800.)

JOHN GRAHAM
Forty-five paintings by the Russian civil servant who reinvented himself as a New York artist and cohort of Gorky, de Kooning, and Pollock. Included here are goggle-eyed seductresses, alchemical symbols, warhorses and soldiers, and a collection of sixteen erotic drawings. Through Dec. 22. (Stone, 113 E. 90th St. 212-987-4997.)

CHARLES MARVILLE
Marville was appointed the official photographer of Paris in 1862; this collection of photographs of Paris streetlamps was his last major commission before his death, in 1879. Through Dec. 3. (Howard Greenberg, 41 E. 57th St. 212-334-0010.)

STEVE PYKE
Pyke, a staff photographer for this magazine, shows elegant and meticulous studies of medical tools, each implement isolated in the center of a clinically clean white square. Recalling Walker Evans's 1955 still-lifes of common work tools for *Fortune*, these images veer into David Cronenberg territory: half of the instruments aid in the birth process, the other half facilitate autopsies. If the difference isn't immediately apparent, the titles ("Bowel Scissors," "Brain Knife," "Rib Shears") are chilling reminders that entering and leaving this world aren't always entirely natural processes. Pyke, splicing pared-down modernism and the Pop product shot, remains the neutral observer. Through Nov. 12. (Flowers, 1000 Madison Ave., at 77th St. 212-439-1700.)

GALLERIES-CHELSEA

CHRIS DOYLE
The one sculpture in Doyle's show, titled "The Eagle," is a giant, gimcrack construction of wooden struts and fluorescent lights. A series of videos are clunkily animated and depict things like the framework eagle flapping its wings, a Joe-normal guy flying Superman-style, a skyscraper-shaped roll of clay, and a luxe double bed made and unmade by unseen hands. Are these tiny personal gestures trying to combat war-on-terror despair? One assumes that the rather vacant, slapdash mood of the work is intentional, but it doesn't serve the project's deeper aspirations. Through Nov. 12. (Jessica Murray, 150 Eleventh Ave., at 21st St. 212-633-9606.)

SERGEJ JENSEN
What happens when you remove paint from the equation of painting? Eighteen works by this Berlin-based newcomer deftly investigate the question. Constructed from sewn-together fabrics, including burlap, denim, silk, linen, and wool, and staining agents that simulate brushstrokes and gesture on canvas, the "paintings," as Jensen calls them, hover between ready-mades and schoolchildren's collages, between the knowing and the simplistic. With titles like "United Nations" and "Nosferatu" suggesting both serious-mindedness and playfulness, they defy the craft quality of the materials, urging for a deeper reading of what's at hand and imparting a new energy to an old, yet unmistakably still viable, medium. Through Nov. 12. (Kern, 532 W. 20th St. 212-367-9663.)

MATT JOHNSON
Johnson is in the unenviable position of following up a lauded début that included disarming charmers like a mini-tower of plastic ice cubes that mimicked Brancusi's "Endless Column" and a plastic replica of a slice of toast with a face bitten into it. This time, the scale of his sculptures is larger, and the mood vacillates between flippant and ponderous. A pianist seated at a baby grand, both made of folded plastic tarps, nods to Robert J. Lang, the kitschy origami master. "Old Globe," carved into a flat stone, depicts the Mesozoic supercontinent Pangaea, while "Parlor Trick," with its saltshaker and forks balanced on toothpicks, reminds one of the punning playfulness of his earlier works—that is, those from 2004. Through Nov. 12. (Taxter & Spengemann, 504 W. 22nd St. 212-924-0212.)

ANDRÉ KERTÉSZ
Although it contains some of the same material, this show of contact prints from Kertész's earliest years as a photographer (1912-25) is too engaging and expansive to be thought of as a footnote to the Kertész retrospective now at the International Center of Photography. Viewing these tiny images (the gallery thoughtfully supplies magnifying glasses), we can see an already precociously sophisticated artist learning and perfecting his craft. The poetic spirit that animates photos of his brother Jeno frolicking naked in the fields also sparks nature studies, portraits, landscapes, and even wartime shots of his fellow-soldiers. The miniature scale highlights Kertész's natural mastery. Through Nov. 12. (Silverstein, 535 W. 24th St. 212-627-3930.)

"THE PLAIN OF HEAVEN"
Renovation of the High Line into public green space is scheduled to begin later this year; Dia also plans to build an exhibition hall in a former chicken warehouse in the meatpacking district, at the southern end of the elevated track. This show depicts the abandoned industrial pastoral in its present state. The warehouse is enormous yet claustrophobic, with art works tucked into spooky bays and lockers whose original purposes are indicated by their prominent floor drains. Not surprisingly, a mood of caustic elegy prevails. Gordon Matta-Clark's beautiful film "Day's End" (1975) documents a guerrilla "building cut" on a Hudson River pier, and the choreographer William Forsythe stages a lovely performance with a single dancer—male, dressed in work clothes—moving in a forest of hanging cords, each weighted by a swinging metal plummet. Helen Mirra transforms an echoing, dark hall (formerly a freezer room) with haunting sound. Also among the fourteen artists participating are Adam Cvijanovic, Corey McCorkle, Leandro Erlich, and Sol LeWitt. Through Nov. 20. (820 Washington St. Open Fridays to Sundays, noon to 6. For more information, call Creative Time, 212-206-6674.)

Short List

JEREMY BLAKE: Feigen, 535 W. 20th St. 212-929-0500. Through Nov. 12. **EMILIE CLARK:** Steinberg, 526 W. 26th St. 212-924-5770. Through Nov. 12. **GARDAR EIDE EINARSSON:** Team, 527 W. 26th St. 212-279-9219. Through Nov. 5. **DANIEL LIBESKIND:** Protetch, 511 W. 22nd St. 212-633-6999. Through Nov. 5. **RYAN MCGINNISS:** Danziger, 521 W. 26th St. 212-629-6778. Through Nov. 26. **SHIRIN NESHAT:** Gladstone, 515 W. 24th St. 212-206-9300. Through Nov. 12. **ED RUSCHA:** Richardson, 535 W. 22nd St. 646-230-9610. Through Nov. 5. **LISE SARFATI:** Milo, 525 W. 25th St. 212-414-0370. Through Nov. 26. **LUC TUYMANS:** Zwirner, 525 W. 19th St. 212-727-2070. Through Nov. 19. **"TWIXT TWO WORLDS, OR THE UNIN-**

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Note: The Digital Imaging and Design, and Graphic Communications Management and Technology sessions will be held at the NYU Midtown Center, 11 West 42nd St., 10th Fl.

– Tuesday, December 13, 6-8 p.m.
Grand Hyatt Hotel, Conference Level , 42nd St. and Park Ave. *(at Grand Central)*
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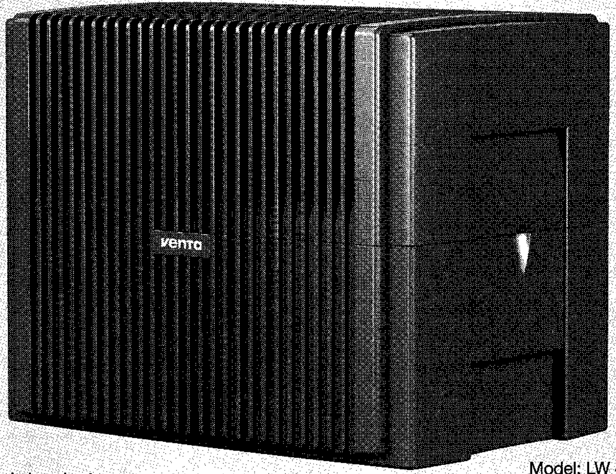

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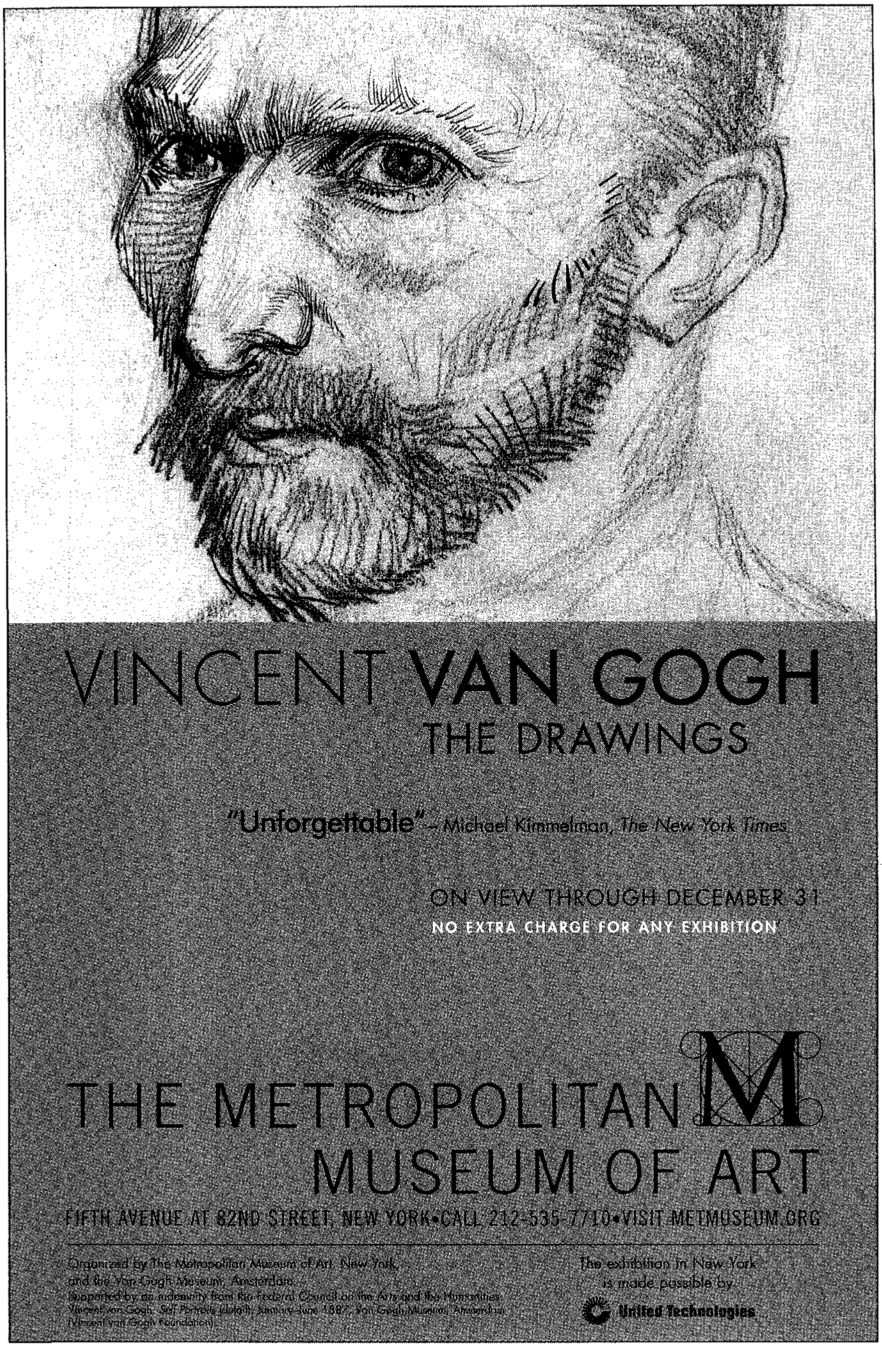
GALLERIES—DOWNTOWN

RYAN MCGINNESS
The brightly trendy McGinness makes decorative painting products rather than paintings: dense overlays of intricate calligraphy and made-up logos in toothsome colors. An installation at Deitch features painting on walls and on lollipop-like projecting disks; Danziger shows silk screens on distressed brown paper. The contrast between glossy and matte, transparent and opaque, and other opposed qualities generates pert visual tensions. Imagine a combination of Lari Pittman, Matt Mullican, and Elliott Puckette. McGinness drops hints of thematic gravity—a guillotine motif recurs—but his work seems serious strictly in its will to please, which is ferocious. Through Nov. 5 (Deitch, 76 Grand St. 212-343-7300) and Nov. 26 (Danziger, 521 W. 26th St. 212-629-6778).

DANCE

AMERICAN BALLET THEATRE
It seems fitting, given recent world events, that the company's fall season, which closes this week, features two great ballets on the subject of death and mourning. Kurt Jooss's "The Green Table" and Antony Tudor's "Dark Elegies" were made in the same period, between the World Wars, and they are often considered their authors' finest works. Set to the "Kindertotenlieder," Mahler's extraordinarily beautiful cycle of songs about a father's suffering at the loss of his children, Tudor's piece is an exploration of the grief of a community whose children are gone. As the baritone Troy Cook sings onstage to the supple orchestration, twelve dancers, alone and in groups, reach for a purity of expression through movements that range from dramatic lifts to folk-dance steps and natural movement, like the smoothing of a dress. The week also includes Agnes de Mille's thrilling "Rodeo," Balanchine's delicately uplifting "Apollo," and "Afternoon of a Faun," Jerome Robbins's take on the barely concealed eroticism of young dancers at work. ♦ Nov. 2 at 7:30: "Les Sylphides," "Apollo" (Ethan Stiefel, Paloma Herrera, Maria Riccetto, and Gillian Murphy), and "The Green Table" (with David Hallberg). ♦ Nov. 3 at 7:30: "Gong," "Dark Elegies" (Melissa Thomas, Julie Kent, Grant DeLong, Jared Matthews, Hee Seo, and Jesus Pastor), and "In the Upper Room." ♦ Nov. 4 at 8: Peter Quanz's "Kaleidoscope" (Murphy, Stiefel, Kent, and Hallberg), "Afternoon of a Faun" (Riccetto and Maxim Beloserkovsky), "Le Corsaire Pas de Deux" (with Herrera and the wonderful Angel Corella), and "Rodeo." ♦ Nov. 5 at 2: "Apollo" (with Jose Manuel Carreño as Apollo), "Dark Elegies," and "In the Upper Room." ♦ Nov. 5 at 8: "Apollo" (with Beloserkovsky as Apollo), "Tchaikovsky Pas de Deux" (Xiomara Reyes and Corella), "Paquita Pas de Deux" (Irina Dvorovenko and Carreño), and "The Green Table" (with Isaac Stappas as Death). ♦ Nov. 6 at 2: "Kaleidoscope" (Murphy, Stiefel, Kent, and Hallberg), "Afternoon of a Faun" (Riccetto and Beloserkovsky), excerpts from "The Howling Cat" (Herrera and Carreño), and "In the Upper Room." (City Center, 131 W. 55th St. 212-581-1212.)

CISNE NEGRO
The choreographer Patrick Delcroix, a French-born veteran of Nederlands Dans Theatre, offers the Brazilian contemporary-dance company "Cherché, Trouvé, Perdu," a study of four couples isolated in squares of light as they search for, find, and lose romantic bliss. Vasco Wellencamp, from Portugal, provides "Canticos Misticos," a straightforward rejoicing to excerpts from Handel's "Messiah." Dany Bittencourt's "Rings" plays with the multiple meanings of the titular shape. (Joyce, 175 Eighth Ave. 212-242-0800. Nov. 1-5 at 8 and Nov. 6 at 7:30.)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"THE SLEEPING BEAUTY NOTEBOOK"
Donald Byrd's clever conceit—to deconstruct the Petipa classic "Sleeping Beauty" as a series of random sketches from a choreographer's journal—has produced a lively, funny evening with some unexpectedly lovely dances. Set on a spare rehearsal stage stocked with Fresnel lights, risers, and chairs, the piece harkens back to old-fashioned ideas about the magic of tulle and greasepaint; its stardust mood is enhanced by Tchaikovsky's grand score. Byrd explores the original's notions of evil and gender with words, sign language, and dance itself, all performed by his Seattle-based company, Spectrum Dance Theatre. (Dance Theatre Workshop, 219 W. 19th St. 212-924-0077. Nov. 2-5 and Nov. 8 at 7:30. Through Nov. 12.)

"CATHAY: THREE TALES OF CHINA"
The latest interdisciplinary puppet-theatre creation from the Obie and Bessie winner Ping Chong, which encompasses the Tang-dynasty period, the Second World War, and present-day China, continues its run. (New Victory Theatre, 209 W. 42nd St. 212-239-6200. Nov. 3-4 at 7, Nov. 5 at 2 and 7, and Nov. 6 at noon and 5. Through Nov. 13.)

AKEMI TAKEYA
Takeya was born in Japan, lives in Vienna, and takes Jean Cocteau as a prime inspiration. Her solo "Bodypoems—Reflection" is a series of five vignettes, glimpses of memory refracted though dreams. In one section, she rubs her neck with a violin bow and makes high-pitched squeals like Meredith Monk. In another, she cartwheels around the stage wearing a baseball glove. The guitarist and electronic musician Marc Weiser accompanies. (Japan Society, 333 E. 47th St. 212-752-3015. Nov. 4-5 at 7:30.)

"FORTY FOR 40"
At a free building-wide party honoring Dance Theatre Workshop's fortieth anniversary, more than forty of downtown dance's best move and groove in the lobbies, stairwells, hallways—even in the box office and the trash room. Donald Byrd has the main stage, but the tour includes ChameckiLerner, David Parker and the Bang Group, Keely Garfield, Cynthia Hopkins, Ellis Wood, and Jennifer Monson. (219 W. 19th St. 212-924-0077. Nov. 7 from 5 to 9.)

COMPAGNIA ATERBALLETTO
The athletic Italian contemporary troupe follows the fad of companies reinventing Stravinsky's "Les Noces" with its own gleaming, mechanistic version. The artistic director Mauro Bigonzetti's choreography pits a few dancers against a marching, chair-wielding army, emphasizing the stark shapes of straight arms and knees bent at a right angle. Bigonzetti's "Petrushka," which takes place in a brilliant-hued clothing shop, comfortably alternates between shoppers doing jumping jacks and a pas de deux performed in white cowboy boots. (BAM's Howard Gilman Opera House, 30 Lafayette Ave., Brooklyn. 718-636-4100. Nov. 8 at 7:30. Through Nov. 12.)

LAR LUBOVITCH DANCE COMPANY
In a program of two contrasting works, the veteran choreographer offers a glossy, entertaining blend of ballet and modern. "Elemental Brubeck," a fizzy bebop suite that recalls Gene Kelly's jazz dances, has its U.S. première after being performed by the San Francisco Ballet in Paris in July. "Men's Stories," a flowing sequence of arresting solos, provocative duets, and sharp ensemble work, boasts five of the original nine performers from its much praised début, in 2000. Clad in black velvet tailcoats, they lunge and strut with verve and stretch out their arms as if bestowing blessings. Scott Marshall's intriguing, weird score sets the tone: chunks of Beethoven piano concertos, blurred with everything from conversation to calliope. (Skirball Center, 566 LaGuardia Pl. 212-279-4200. Nov. 8 at 8. Through Nov. 12.)

YASS HAKOSHIMA MOVEMENT THEATRE
Hakoshima—who trained as a ballet dancer in Japan, then studied mime with Marcel Marceau's teacher Étienne Decroux and modern dance with Martha Graham's muse Erick Hawkins—offers a mime theatre that is a blend of Eastern and Western traditions, infused with vocalizations, masks, calligraphy, Zen, and Noh. "Duality," a program of scenes exploring the dark and light aspects of human nature, will be accompanied by the Da Capo Chamber Players. (Symphony Space, Broadway at 95th St. 212-864-5400. Nov. 8 at 8.)

CLASSICAL MUSIC

OPERA

METROPOLITAN OPERA

Nov. 2 at 7:30, Nov. 5 at 1:30, and Nov. 8 at 8: Jonathan Miller's Met productions may have a cramped and tetchy air to them, but he is a director who delights in dressing down the affectations of his high-born characters. It's an approach that suits **"Le Nozze di Figaro,"** Mozart and Da Ponte's crafty sequence of scenes from the class struggle in eighteenth-century Spain. Two estimable artists, the conductor Mark Wigglesworth and the mezzo-soprano Joyce DiDonato (singing Cherubino), make their débuts; the cast also features Hei-Kyung Hong, Lisa Milne, Peter Mattei, and Luca Pisaroni. ♦ Nov. 3 at 8 and Nov. 7 at 7:30: Nicolas Joël's plush production of **"Lucia di Lammermoor,"** from 1998, features the soprano Elizabeth Futral in the title role, along with Giuseppe Filianoti (making his début, as Edgardo), Charles Taylor, and John Relyea; Edoardo Müller conducts. ♦ Nov. 4 at 8: A rich Mozart week continues with **"Così Fan Tutte,"** featuring Barbara Frittoli, Maria Zifchak, Nuccia Focile, Matthew Polenzani, Mariusz Kwiecien, and Julien Robbins; James Levine. ♦ Nov. 5 at 8: **"Aida,"** featuring Hasmik Papian in the title role, along with Yvonne Naef, Franco Farina, Mark Delavan, and Paata Burchuladze; James Conlon. (Metropolitan Opera House. 212-362-6000.)

NEW YORK CITY OPERA

Nov. 2 at 7:30 and Nov. 5 at 1:30: Richard Rodney Bennett's **"The Mines of Sulphur,"** an engaging and dramatic opera noir set in Restoration England, features Caroline Worra, Jessie Raven, and Mark Duffin in its New York première run; George Manahan conducts. (These are the final performances.) ♦ Nov. 4 at 8, Nov. 6 at 1:30, and Nov. 8 at 7:30: Notable for its shrewd employment of diaphanous curtains and attractive costumes, City Opera's production of **"Turandot"** manages to provide abundant spectacle without a lot of expensive clutter. Lori Phillips and Philip Webb are Turandot and Calaf; Manahan. ♦ Nov. 5 at 8: **"Il Barbiere di Siviglia,"** with Jennifer Rivera, Hugh Russell, John Tessier, and Nikolay Didenko; Joseph Rescigno. (New York State Theatre. 212-721-6500.)

AMATO OPERA

Well-trained singers take the leading roles in Anthony Amato's shoestring production of **"La Traviata,"** backed by amateurs who sometimes have more heart than vocal skill. But it's all very Italian, very endearing, and just as authentic as CBGB, right next door. (Amato Opera Theatre, 319 Bowery, at 2nd St. 212-228-8200. Nov. 5 at 7:30 and Nov. 6 at 2:30.)

ORCHESTRAS AND CHORUSES

NEW YORK PHILHARMONIC

Mikko Franck, one of the more recent wonders to spring from Helsinki's great Sibelius Academy, conducts the orchestra in Beethoven's "Leonore" Overture No. 3, Shostakovich's Fifth Symphony, and Schnittke's Concerto Grosso No. 5 (with the plangent Gidon Kremer as violin soloist). (Avery Fisher Hall. 212-875-5656. Nov. 3 at 7:30, Nov. 4 at 2, and Nov. 5 at 8.)

BRUCKNER ORCHESTRA LINZ: PHILIP GLASS

Dennis Russell Davies, a devoted advocate of the composer's music, leads his Austrian ensemble in the Symphony No. 6 ("Plutonian Ode," with Allen Ginsberg's text sung by Lauren Flanigan) and the world première of the Symphony No. 8 at the Brooklyn Academy of Music. (30 Lafayette Ave. 718-636-4100. Nov. 2 and Nov. 4-5 at 7:30.)

ORCHESTRA OF ST. LUKE'S

Li Jian leads a concert that offers a rare chance to hear the redoubtable Gary Graffman, who performs Prokofiev's Piano Concerto No. 4 (for the Left Hand); his student Ran Jia is the soloist in Mozart's Piano Concerto No. 21 in C Major. (Alice Tully Hall. 212-721-6500. Nov. 3 at 8.)

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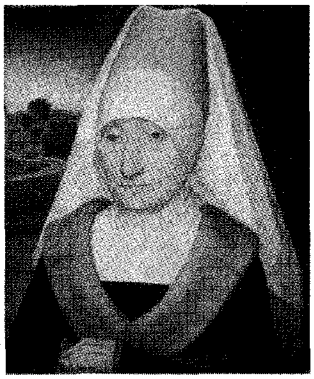
CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK
TRUE NORTH

The transcendent touch of the fifteenth-century painter Hans Memling is so rare and subtle—so easily mistaken for mere, sweet ingenuity—that you may have to see lots of his work really to see it at all. The Frick's show of his portraits—twenty of the thirty or so that survive (three more are on permanent view at the Met)—attains critical mass. Memling soared beyond other Flemish masters, including his probable teacher Rogier van der Weyden, in coaxing poetry from the then newfangled medium of oil paint. Consider the light in his vivid pictures of serene aristocrats and merchants. Neither quite falling on nor quite radiating from the faces, it seems identical with them—as if light and flesh were one stuff, sculpted by nature and the sitter's character. Memling manages the gentle thrust of chins and noses so well it's as if he had invented them. His pioneering use of airy landscape backgrounds conveys a singing harmony of the natural and the personal. Each Memling subject looks the way you feel on the best days of your life.

—*Peter Schjeldahl*



"PORTRAIT OF AN ELDERLY COUPLE (WOMAN)" (CA. 1470-75), MUSÉE DU LOUVRE

tra in the Germanic music he favors, with several of his principal players in solo roles. (All performances are at 8.) Nov. 3: Music by Mozart (the Sinfonia Concertante for Oboe, Clarinet, Bassoon, and Horn) and Bruckner (the Symphony No. 5 in B-Flat Major). ♦ Nov. 4: Performances of Mozart's Flute Concerto No. 1 in G Major and Schubert's Ninth Symphony bookend the New York première of Elliott Carter's "Soundings." ♦ Nov. 5: Schoenberg's "Variations for Orchestra"—the most difficult work in the standard repertory—is followed by Mahler's Symphony No. 5. (Carnegie Hall. 212-247-7800.)

RIVERSIDE SYMPHONY
Prokofiev's "Peter and the Wolf"—narrated by Sam Waterston—is the centerpiece of George Rothman's latest program, which also features music by Hartke and Mozart (the Symphony No. 39). (Alice Tully Hall. 212-721-6500. Nov. 5 at 7:30.)

RECITALS

MUSIC AT THE 92ND STREET Y
Nov. 1-2 at 8: The Kalichstein-Laredo-Robinson Trio, masters of their brief, perform both of Shostakovich's Piano Trios, along with Mozart's Piano Trio in B-Flat Major, K. 502, and a Mozart arrangement by Arvo Pärt. ♦ Nov. 5 at 8: With string trios as rare as hen's teeth, three established virtuosos—the violinist Robert McDuffie, the violist Lawrence Dutton, and the cellist Ralph Kirshbaum—have formed an occasional one of their own, touring with two standard works (Mozart's Trio and Dohnányi's "Serenade") and a rarity (Beethoven's Trio in C Major, a transcription of the bumptious Trio for Two Oboes and English Horn). (Lexington Ave. at 92nd St. 212-415-5500.)

LUCY SHELTON AND PEDJA MUZIJEVIC
The soprano and the pianist, in a tribute to Lorenzo da Ponte, perform songs by Ives, Wolf, Haydn, Glinka, and Francis Hopkinson (a signer of the Declaration of Independence) at Columbia University, the Italian librettist and scholar's last hitching post. (Italian Academy, 1161 Amsterdam Ave. 212-854-1623. Nov. 2 at 8.)

MILLER THEATRE: "BACH IN CONTEXT"
Nov. 2 at 8: "Bach and Telemann at the Royal Hunt," a program (featuring the First and Fifth Brandenburg Concertos) with the excellent New York Baroque group Rebel (and guest horns). ♦ Nov. 5 at 7:30: The noted Canadian pianist Angela Hewitt performs Book I of "The Well-Tempered Clavier" on an exquisite Fazioli piano. (Columbia University, Broadway at 116th St. 212-854-7799.)

CHAMBER MUSIC SOCIETY OF LINCOLN CENTER: "DOUBLE EXPOSURE"
New music by Eric Moe, Allen Shawn, and others is performed (by such musicians as David Cerutti, on viola d'amore) and then repeated, after a break for refreshments. (Rose Studio, Rose Building. 212-875-5788. Nov. 3 at 6:45.)

BARGEMUSIC
The violinist Linda Rosenthal, the cellist Evan Drachman, and the pianist Doris Stevenson lead off in the first of three weekend programs at Olga Bloom's doughty chamber-music series—music by Bruch ("Kol Nidre"), Arensky, Dvořák, and Paul Schoenfield (the rambunctious "Café Music"). (Fulton Ferry Landing, Brooklyn. 718-624-2083. Nov. 3 at 7:30. For full listings, see www.bargemusic.org.)

MUSIC AT THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM
Nov. 5 at 8: Those who miss the oboist Joseph Robinson's magisterial performances in the first chair at the Philharmonic can catch him performing Mozart's Oboe Quartet with members of the Guarneri String Quartet, who also offer quartets by Debussy and Brahms. ♦ Nov. 6 at 8: The Temple of Dendur, which despite its indifferent acoustics has become a favorite site for blockbuster vocal concerts, presents the superb medieval groups Sequentia and Dialogos singing selections from their new album, "Chant Wars." (Fifth Ave. at 82nd St. 212-570-3949. For full listings, see www.metmuseum.org.)

"MAKING MUSIC": MEREDITH MONK
The trailblazing composer and performance artist, now an established master, participates with her vocal ensemble in a four-hour marathon concert that also features the pianist Ursula Oppens and the Bang on a Can All-Stars. (Zankel Hall. 212-247-7800. Nov. 6 at 2.)

"MUSIC BEFORE 1800" SERIES: GALATEA
The European Baroque quintet—boasting such luminaries as the violinist Monica Huggett—makes its New York début, offering a banquet of Italian sinfonias, sonatas, and canzonas from the seventeenth century. (Corpus Christi Church, 529 W. 121st St. 212-666-9266. Nov. 6 at 4.)

ALEXANDER HURD
Joy in Singing's 2005 Award recitalist, a young American baritone and Fulbright scholar, sings songs by Wolf, Schubert, Ravel ("Histoires Naturelles"), and John Musto. (Merkin Concert Hall, 129 W. 67th St. 212-501-3330. Nov. 7 at 8.)

MATTHIAS GOERNE
The baritone, an uncommonly intense and dark-hued vocalist, offers songs by Mahler (selections from "Des Knaben Wunderhorn"), Berg, and Wagner, with Wolfram Rieger at the piano. (Alice Tully Hall. 212-721-6500. Nov. 8 at 8.)

MOVIES OPENING

CHICKEN LITTLE
An animated comedy about Chicken Little, who must repair his reputation after mistakenly assuming the sky is falling when an acorn hits him on the head. With voices by Zach Braff, Garry Marshall, Joan Cusack, and Don Knotts. Opening Nov. 4. (In wide release.)

DALTRY CALHOUN
In a comic drama written and directed by Katrina Holden Bronson, a father struggles to keep his Tennessee golf empire intact when his gifted fourteen-year-old daughter is left in his care. With Johnny Knoxville, Elizabeth Banks, and Juliette Lewis. Opening Nov. 4. (Empire 25.)

THE DYING GAUL
Craig Lucas directed this psychological thriller based on his play, about a Hollywood screenwriter (Peter Sarsgaard) who becomes involved with a film executive (Campbell Scott) and his wife (Patricia Clarkson). Opening Nov. 4. (In wide release.)

GAY SEX IN THE 70S
A documentary about the rampant sexual exploration during the time between the Stonewall riots, in 1969, and the first reported case of AIDS, in 1981. Directed by Joseph Lovett. Opening Nov. 4. (Quad Cinema.)

JARHEAD
Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. Opening Nov. 4. (In wide release.)

NOW PLAYING

CAPOTE
How could Truman Capote, with his high, thin, goose-quill voice and his floating palms, possibly have gained the trust of the straightforward men and women of Holcomb, Kansas, when he went there for this magazine in 1959 to investigate the pointless slaughter of four members of the Clutter family—the murders that became the subject of Capote's masterpiece, "In Cold Blood"? The writer Dan Futterman and the director Bennett Miller tell us how, and the wonderful Philip Seymour Hoffman first captures Capote physically and then works inward to the vulnerable yet rotting soul. When Capote gets a look at one of the murderers, Perry Smith (Clifton Collins, Jr.), the focus of the movie becomes the intimate, artistically necessary but morally questionable relation between artist and felon. With Catherine Keener as the novelist Harper Lee; Mark Pellegrino as Perry's partner, Dick Hickock; and Bob Balaban as the *New Yorker* editor William Shawn, who is pictured, bizarrely, as hungry for the bloody details of the crime.—*David Denby* (Reviewed in our issue of 10/10/05.) (In wide release.)

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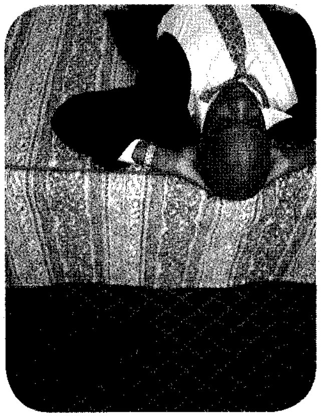

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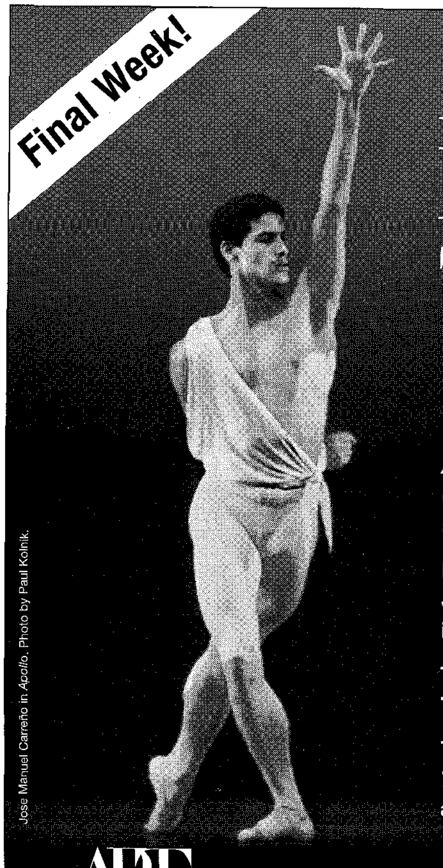
Jose Manuel Carreño in *Apollo*. Photo by Paul Kolnik.

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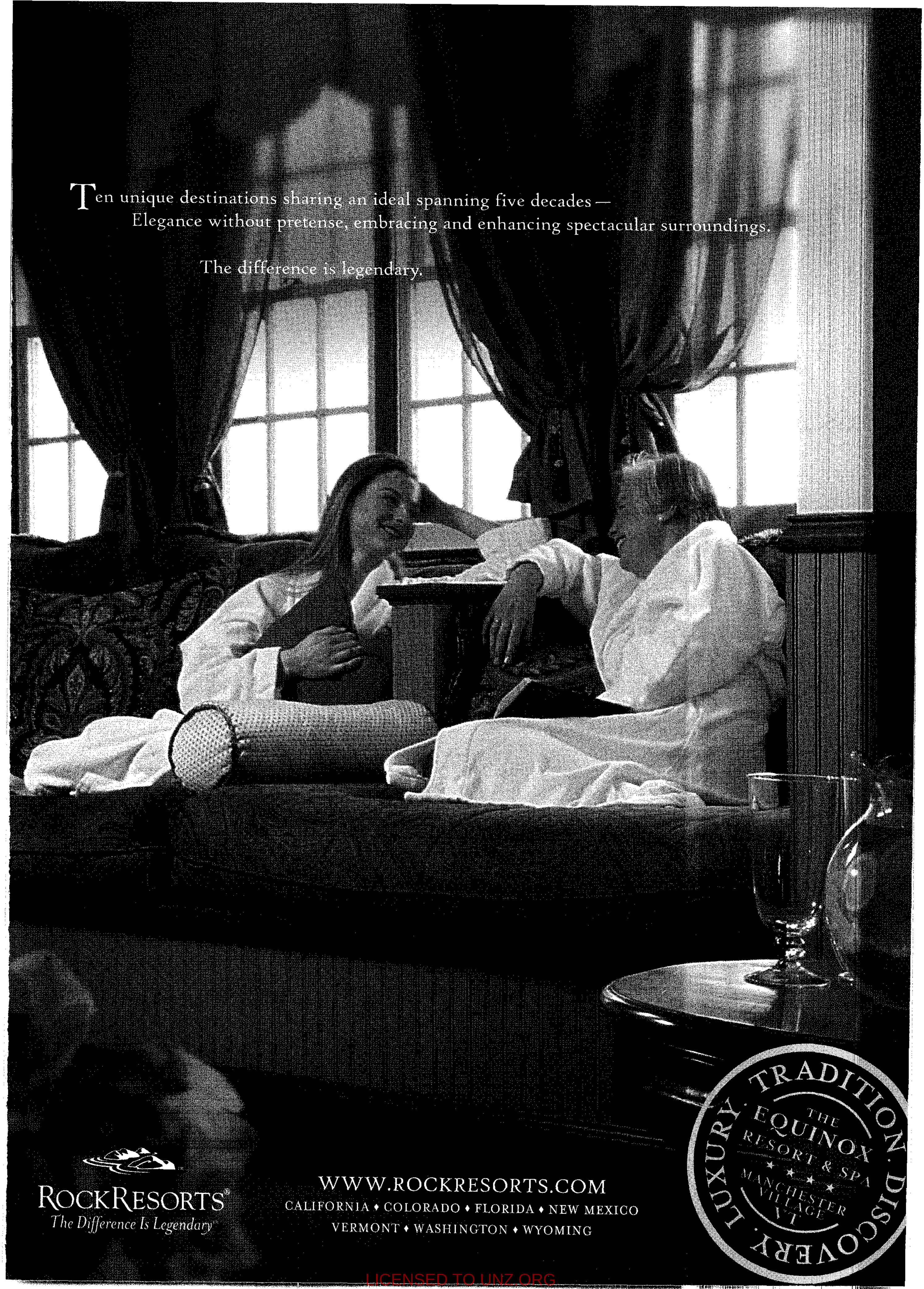
ELIZABETHTOWN
Vacuous. Drew (Orlando Bloom), a handsome young man, loses a fortune for an international sneaker company by designing a silly shoe—and then his father dies. He travels to his father's birthplace, Elizabethtown, Kentucky, and confronts the enormous family of busybodies his dad left behind decades ago. But these are his father's people, not Drew's, and he walks through the noisy family gatherings in a bemused fog. A chipper flight attendant (Kirsten Dunst), whom he had met on the plane to Kentucky, decides to bring him to life, and their affair takes off in an interminable cell-phone conversation. The writer-director Cameron Crowe is attempting a modern screwball comedy—the kind of thing that, sixty years ago, would have been a swiftly paced romantic farce—but he has scaled the movie as an epic and turned his heroine into a font of New Age wisdom. At times the movie is so pointless that one becomes aware of the footage remorselessly moving through the projector. With Susan Sarandon as Drew's widowed mom, who capers all over the place at an embarrassing memorial service.—*D.D.* (10/24/05) (In wide release.)

FLIGHTPLAN
Jodie Foster stars as a grief-stricken aeronautical engineer travelling home to New York with her six-year-old daughter to bury her husband. When she awakes after a short nap and finds her child gone, none of the other passengers remember seeing the little girl, and it's up to Foster, in perfect closeup, to act up a storm and demand action. With gliding camerawork and amazing production design (the two-story aircraft was built by Alexander Hammond), the director, Robert Schwentke, gives Foster plenty of room in which to panic. But the film is seriously underwritten and devolves into a ludicrous finale.—*Bruce Diones* (In wide release.)

GOOD NIGHT, AND GOOD LUCK
George Clooney's nifty account of Edward R. Murrow's historic prime-time assaults on Senator Joseph R. McCarthy, in 1954, imitates many of Murrow's best qualities—it's swift, elegant, grimly humorous, and effective. David Strathairn gets the suavely streamlined Murrow perfectly—the pomaded jet-black hair, the thick brows and unblinking eyes, the curt, rhyming syntax and firm emphasis. Clooney's most serious intention appears to be to deliver a blow to the patella of a somnolent American press that, until recently, has indulged the Bush Administration's most extravagant smears and lies. He has completely succeeded. With Clooney himself as Murrow's partner, Fred Friendly, and Frank Langella as the CBS chairman William S. Paley. Robert Elswit did the black-and-white cinematography, which matches kinescopes of McCarthy's actual speeches.—*D.D.* (10/10/05) (In wide release.)

A HISTORY OF VIOLENCE
David Cronenberg's latest is a noirish story about a seemingly settled Indiana man, Tom Stall (Viggo Mortensen), who displays an unsuspected talent for violence when a couple of killers invade the café he runs in a small town. Soon after, a mobster from Philadelphia with a glass eye (Ed Harris) shows up and addresses Tom as "Joey." Is some sort of buried past taking over Tom's life? The movie asks us to believe that one man can carry two entirely different personalities within him and still be as sane as daylight. Cronenberg's direction, mirroring the split in Tom, is alternately measured and frighteningly explosive, and, as always, he gives the movie a nasty underlay of sexual perversity. With Maria Bello, Ashton Holmes, and, as still another Philadelphia mobster, William Hurt, who seems to be having a ball.—*D.D.* (In wide release.)

IN HER SHOES
Unlovely Rose (Toni Collette) is a lawyer living alone in Philadelphia. From time to time she is called upon to rescue, house, or help her wayward sister Maggie (Cameron Diaz), whose hobbies include falling into alcoholic stupors and collecting unsuitable men. Finally, the strain becomes too great, and Maggie flees in desperation to Florida, where Ella (Shirley MacLaine), the formidable grandmother whom neither sister has seen since childhood, resides in a retirement home. The director, Curtis Hanson, and his screenwriter, Susannah Grant, are efficient managers of the emotional progress made by their characters; but why does it take more than two hours to arrive



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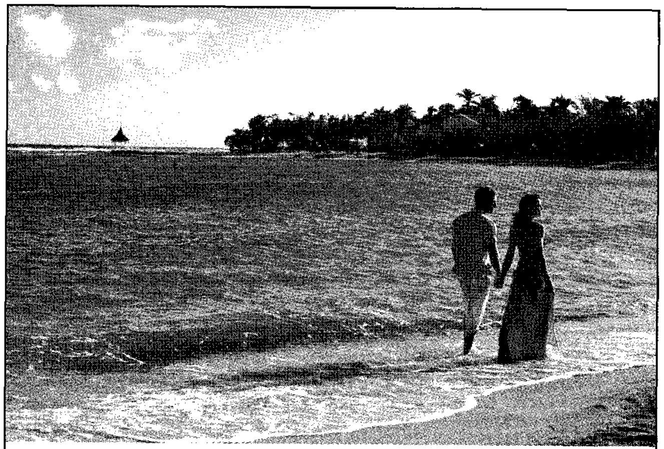

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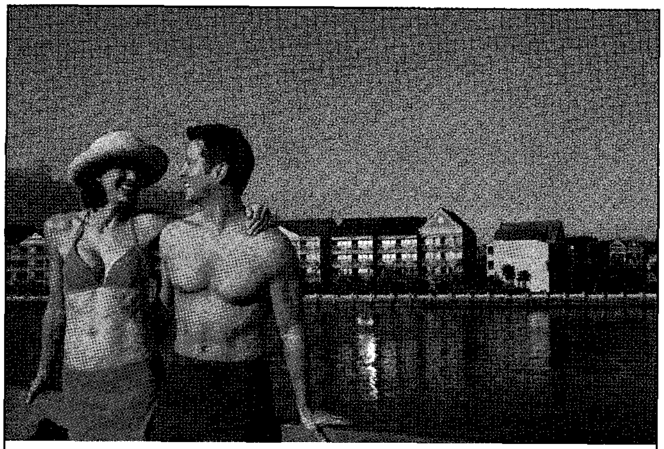

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at a reconciliation that was visible in the first ten minutes? In comparison with Hanson's other work, in "L.A. Confidential" and "Wonder Boys," this project feels dangerously confected, sliding at times toward the cute. The best reason to stick with it is the scene in which Cameron Diaz reads an Elizabeth Bishop poem to an elderly blind man, played with curt charm by Norman Lloyd.—*Anthony Lane* (10/17/05) (In wide release.)

KISS KISS, BANG BANG

A tangled web, woven by the writer and director Shane Black. Even if this movie were to become a cult hit (which it achingly wants to be), one cannot imagine that upon repeated viewings it would make any sense. Robert Downey, Jr., plays Harry Lockhart, a New York thief who stumbles into a movie audition and winds up in L.A., where the preparation for his screen test is aided by a private detective known as Gay Perry (Val Kilmer). For good measure, Harry bumps into an old friend, Harmony (Michelle Monaghan), from his Indiana days. At this point, needless to say, real bodies start to accrue, and real—if comically untroubling—crimes demand to be solved. Black wants both to reanimate and to mock the devices of pulp, from Raymond Chandler downward; such knowingness occupies him so intensely that, by the end, he is falling over himself trying to tie up the threads of plot, none of which mattered in the first place. The result should be painful to behold, yet somehow it comes off; all three leads, especially Downey, get high on the fizz of the project, and the fussy, needful patter between him and Kilmer feels like it could rattle on forever.—*A.L.* (10/31/05) (In wide release.)

NORTH COUNTRY

The director Niki Caro, who caused a stir with "Whale Rider," has shifted her gaze from her native New Zealand to the iron mines of Minnesota, a more forbidding prospect altogether. It is there that Josey (Charlize Theron) comes to make a new start, bringing her two children from a bruised marriage. With the encouragement of her friend Glory (Frances McDormand), Josey takes a job at the mines, runs head first into the brutish scorn of the male workers, and determines to do something about it. On paper, Caro's film sounds worthy to the point of glumness, and viewers digging for humor will find little cheer; as was the case, though, with campaigning pictures like "Silkwood" and "Norma Rae," any fears that the story will slacken or slump are dispelled by the drive of the performances. Theron's anger is all too credible, and she is backed by such formidable team players as Sissy Spacek and Richard Jenkins, in the role of Josey's parents, and Michelle Monaghan, who plays her young, despairing colleague.—*A.L.* (10/31/05) (In wide release.)

PARADISE NOW

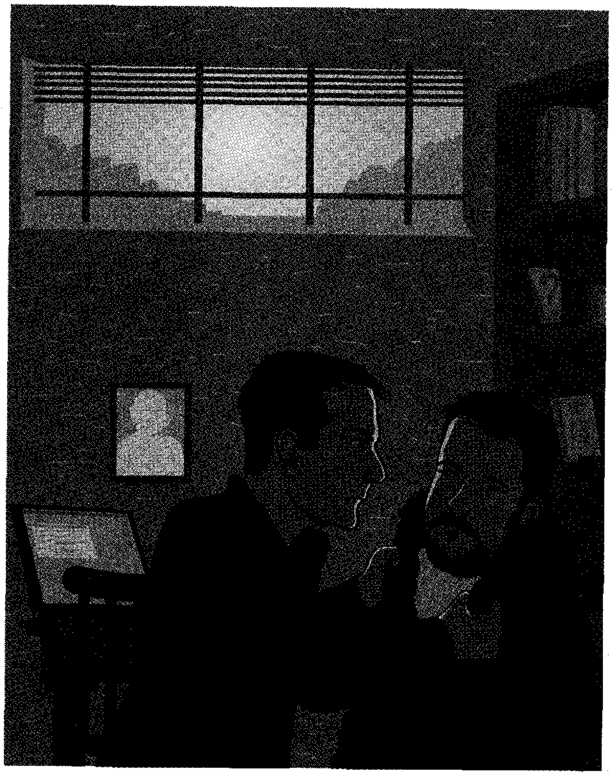
In the West Bank city of Nablus, two seemingly ordinary young Palestinians, Saïd (Kais Nashef) and Khaled (Ali Suliman), turn out to be potential suicide bombers. One of them, it turns out, is a fanatic; the other has rational doubts. A provocative idea, but Hany Abu-Assad's film is missing some connective tissue and a greater context for the men's actions. The most satisfying element in the film is the actual settings—the crumbling and blasted stones of Nablus, and, when the men get to Tel Aviv, the sumptuous glitter of a wealthy modern city. With Lubna Azabal as a vibrant young woman who is sick of violence.—*D.D.* (Lincoln Plaza Cinemas and Sunshine Cinema.)

PRIME

Meryl Streep gives one of her wittiest performances in Ben Younger's comedy about a middle-aged Jewish hausfrau-therapist from the Upper West Side who discovers that a longtime patient, a thirty-nine-year-old divorcée (Uma Thurman), is dating the therapist's handsome twenty-three-year-old son (Bryan Greenberg). Streep fidgets and rotates her neck and rolls her eyes—it's the broadest work she's ever done. The movie, which shifts from comedy to bittersweet ruefulness, is a little on the tepid side, but it plays easily enough, and Thurman, long and slinky, with golden skin, is irresistible as a woman in love.—*D.D.* (In wide release.)

THE PRIVATE LIFE OF SHERLOCK HOLMES

Billy Wilder's detective picture from 1970 is meant to be a put-on of the Sherlock Holmes mythology, concentrating on a case that Holmes (Robert Stephens) fouls up because he's distracted by the treachery of a smart charmer (Geneviève Page). But for this idea to have bounce and suspense we need to see the clues and draw our own inferences, so that we can spot where Holmes is going wrong and enjoy his mistakes. And for it to be somewhat romantic, as it's intended to be, we need to see much more of how the woman deceives him. Instead, one must content oneself with the occasional archly amusing lines, the handsome Victorian décor, and Christopher Challis's lovely (if somewhat dark) tinted-looking cinematography. It's a graceful picture, but it dawdles, and Stephens doesn't seem to have the star presence that Holmes requires.—*Pauline Kael* (Museum of the Moving Image; Nov. 5-6.)



Craig Lucas's "The Dying Gaul" opens November 4.

MAXIMILIAN BODE

SHOPGIRL

Standing behind a glove counter at Saks in Los Angeles, Claire Danes has an expectant but unfocussed air about her—she's like an enigmatic figure in a painted portrait. In this adaptation of Steve Martin's novella from 2000, the director Anand Tucker lovingly photographs the angular, big-boned Danes in a variety of graceful poses, dressed and undressed. Danes is an appealing woman, but moviegoers may find themselves baffled as to why she must choose between the ferrety Jason Schwartzman and Martin himself, in an inert performance as an aging Lothario who can't give her the love that she needs. The movie offers high-style sets and elegantly blended colors to frame what turns out to be an under-written and under-dramatized story. Written by Martin.—*D.D.* (In wide release.)

THE SQUID AND THE WHALE

The time is 1986, in Brooklyn's idyllic Park Slope, and a family is breaking up. The dad, Bernard (Jeff Daniels), a college literature teacher and an increasingly unsuccessful novelist, has become a sour and selfish liar; the mom, Joan (Laura Linney), can't stop leaving evidence of her love affairs around the house. Trying to hold on to their love for their parents, their two boys fall into increasingly nutty imitative behavior. Walt (Jesse Eisenberg), sixteen, parrots every one of his dad's huffy opinions; Frank (Owen Kline), a twelve-year-old in a sexual uproar, imitates his mom's indiscretions by rubbing his crotch against library shelves and leaving deposits on schoolbooks and lockers. The movie is a satirical comedy—ruthless and heartbreaking—but a comedy nonetheless; the writer-director Noah Baumbach has captured the way educated parents project their self-love and their career anxieties onto bright children, and the way kids respond to the currents of parental misconduct like pilot fish shimmying around a wayward shark. Baumbach's touch is light, sure, devastating. With Anna Paquin as a creative-writing-student hustler and William Baldwin as a sexually available tennis pro.—*D.D.* (10/24/05) (In wide release.)

STAR TREK II: THE WRATH OF KHAN

Wonderful dumb fun. The director, Nicholas Meyer, hits just the right amused, slightly self-mocking note in the opening scenes, and the same actors who looked flabby and embarrassed in the "Star Trek: The Motion Picture" (1979) turn into a troupe of confident, witty professionals. The theme of this endlessly inventive movie from 1982 is death and rebirth, with the prim, smug Admiral Kirk (William Shatner), who has become stiff from sitting at his administrative post, taking a three-week cruise on his old starship, the Enterprise, encountering his old enemy, the maniacal Khan (Ricardo Montalban), and waking up. Montalban plays his fiery villainy to the hilt, smiling grimly as he does the dirty; his bravado is grandly comic. The pieces of the story fit together so beautifully that eventually the director has you wrapped up in the foolishness. By the end, all the large, sappy, satisfying emotions get to you.—*P.K.* (Sunshine Cinema; Nov. 4-5.)

TWO FOR THE MONEY

There is little to hang on to in this sports-gambling drama directed by D. J. Caruso, which stars Matthew McConaughey as Brandon, a spent athlete who can pick the winners; Al Pacino as the king sports-score consultant who lures Brandon from Vegas to New York; and Rene Russo as Pacino's sexy, earnest wife with a past. McConaughey and Russo give fine, if inoffensive, performances, and Pacino reins in his manic tendencies and at times looks so tired that he seems completely authentic. Things pick up when Brandon demands his piece of the action, but the film fails to generate any emotional response to the heavy father-figure plot. Following a barrage of psychological explanation for the pathological pleasure of betting comes the punch line: as much as the characters try to apply skill to their work, they might as well flip a coin.—*Shauna Lyon* (In wide release.)

USHPIZIN

During the weeklong festival of Sukkoth, observant Jews live in huts and consider it a special blessing to welcome guests. In this film, directed by Gidi Dar, Moshe and Malli (Shuli and Michal Bat-Sheva Rand) are a poor, childless couple in an ultra-Orthodox enclave in Jerusalem, and their guests are a pair of non-observant escaped convicts who take lavish advantage of their hosts' bounty—and whose burdensome presence the couple view as a test of faith. The story was filmed on location within the Hasidic community to which the Rands belong, but the access cost the filmmakers their candor. The script's sanitized view of this community and the film's saccharine closeups exclude all wider reality, as Dar sentimentalizes Hasidim as elfin innocents. "Ushpizin" makes "Fiddler on the Roof" look like a hard-hitting exposé. In Hebrew and Yiddish.—*Richard Brody* (Lincoln Plaza Cinemas and Sunshine Cinema.)

WALLACE & GROMIT: THE CURSE OF THE WERE-RABBIT

After their triumphant appearances in short films such as "The Wrong Trousers," Wallace and Gromit—respectively, a pale plasticine man and his clever plasticine dog, created by the British animator Nick Park—have at last been honored with a full-length film of their own. The agelessly English town where our heroes live falls prey to a giant rabbit, which plows

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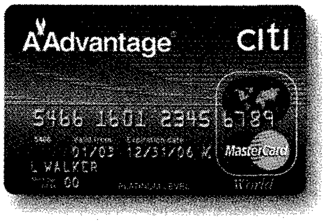

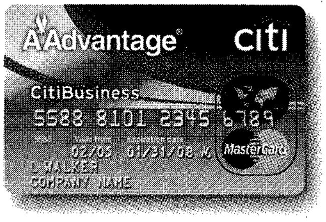

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through the carrots and lettuces that are lovingly cultivated by the populace. The hunt for the pest accelerates toward the kind of climactic chase that Park fans—not far removed from the thrill-tipsy audiences who crowded into early silent comedies—have come to expect. If anything, the new film is slightly too frantic for its own good, affording Wallace and his long-suffering mutt precious little opportunity to hang out in their enviable home. But the strange blend of the domestic and the futuristic pioneered by Park remains intact, and devotees will be relieved to see, as always, the thumb marks in the plasticine; these figures have their own complete existence, yet they were wrought by human hand. With voices by Peter Sallis, Ralph Fiennes, and Helena Bonham Carter.—*A.L.* (10/17/05) (In wide release.)

THE WEATHER MAN
Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. (In wide release.)

Also Playing

BALLET RUSSES: Film Forum. **DREAMER: INSPIRED BY A TRUE STORY:** In wide release. **THE FOG:** In wide release. **INNOCENCE:** Cinema Village. **INNOCENT VOICES:** AMC Empire. **NEW YORK DOLL:** Angelika Film Center. **THE PASSENGER:** Lincoln Plaza Cinemas and Sunshine Cinema. **TIM BURTON'S CORPSE BRIDE:** In wide release.

REVIVALS, CLASSICS, ETC.

Titles with a dagger are reviewed above.

ANTHOLOGY FILM ARCHIVES
32 Second Ave., at 2nd St. (212-505-5181)—"New Filmmakers." Nov. 2 at 8: "Frankenstein vs. the Creature from Blood Cove" (2005, William Winckler). ♦ The fifth annual Indo-American Arts Council Film Festival. Nov. 3-6. Visit www.iaac.us for schedule.

BAM ROSE CINEMAS
30 Lafayette Ave., Brooklyn (718-636-4100)—"New Czech Film." All films are in Czech. Nov. 3 at 4:30, 6:50, and 9:30: "Bitter Coffee" (2004, Börkur Gunnarsson). ♦ Nov. 4 at 2, 4:30, and 7:30: "Up and Down" (2004, Jan Hrebejk). ♦ Nov. 5 at 4 and 8:30: "Champions" (2004, Marek Najbrt). ♦ Nov. 5 at 6: "Czech Dream" (2004, Vit Klusák and Filip Remunda). ♦ Nov. 6 at 2 and 6:50: "Vaterland: A Hunting Book" (2004, David Jarab). ♦ Nov. 6 at 4:30 and 9:15: "Landscape of My Heart" (2004, Jan Nemec). ♦ "A Moving Camera: Kenji Mizoguchi." Nov. 7 at 4:30, 6:50, and 9:15: "Osaka Elegy" (1936; in Japanese). ♦ Nov. 8 at 6 and 9: "The Life of Oharu" (1952; in Japanese).

FILM FORUM
W. Houston St. west of Sixth Ave. (212-727-8110)—In revival. Nov. 2-8 at 1, 3:40, 7, and 9:30: "In Cold Blood" (1967, Richard Brooks). ♦ Through Nov. 17: "Naruse: The Unknown Japanese Master," the films of Mikio Naruse. All films are in Japanese. Nov. 2 at 1, 3:35, 6, and 8:45: "Summer Clouds" (1958). ♦ Nov. 3 at 1:30, 5:15, and 9: "A Wife's Heart" (1956). ♦ Nov. 3 at 3:30 and 7:15: "Husband and Wife" (1953). ♦ Nov. 4-5 at 1:30, 3:30, 5:30, 7:30, and 9:30: "Late Chrysanthemums" (1954). ♦ Nov. 6 at 1:10: "Ginza Cosmetics" (1951). ♦ Nov. 6 at 3, 5:30, and 8 and Nov. 7 at 1 and 3:30: "A Wanderer's Notebook" (1962). ♦ Nov. 7 at 6 and 9:20: "Wife! Be Like a Rose!" (1935). ♦ Nov. 7 at 7:45: "Not Blood Relations" (1932). ♦ Nov. 8 at 1, 4:40, and 8:20: "Tale of the Archery at the Sanjusangendo" (1945). ♦ Nov. 8 at 2:40, 6:20, and 10: "The Song Lantern" (1943).

FLORENCE GOULD HALL
55 E. 59th St. (212-355-6160)—"Cinéma Tuesdays." Nov. 8 at 12:30, 4, and 7: "My American Uncle" (1980, Alain Resnais; in French).

IFC CENTER
323 Sixth Ave., at W. 3rd St. (212-924-7771)—"Weekend Classics." Nov. 4-6 at noon: "Love on the Run" (1979, François Truffaut; in French). ♦ "Waverly Midnights." Nov. 4-5: "Madonna: Truth or Dare" (1991, Alek Keshishian). ♦ "Stranger Than Fiction," a documentary series. Nov. 8 at 7:30: "Abel Raises Cain" (2005, Jenny Abel and Jeff Hockett).

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART
Roy and Niuta Titus Theatres, 11 W. 53rd St. (212-708-9480)—Through Nov. 10: "Kino! 2005." All films are in German. Nov. 2 at 6:15: "Go for Zucker!" (2005, Dani Levy). ♦ Nov. 3 at 6 and Nov. 4 at 8:30: "The Hitler Cantata" (2005, Jutta Bruckner). ♦ Nov. 3 at 8:30 and Nov. 6 at 5: "Ghosts" (2005, Christian Petzold). ♦ Nov. 4 at 6:30 and Nov. 7 at 8:15: "Next Generation," a program of short films. ♦ Nov. 5 at 2:30: "Willenbrock" (2005, Andreas Dresen). ♦ Nov. 5 at 5: "Zeppelin!" (2005, Gordian Maugg). ♦ Nov. 5 at 7:30: "Science Fiction" (2003, Franz Mueller). ♦ Nov. 7 at 6: "A Tale of Two Cities" (2005). ♦ "Jerome: Hill and Foundation." Nov. 2 at 6:15: A program of short films by Jerome Minneapolis grantees (1995-2003). ♦ Nov. 2 at 8: "Albert Schweitzer" (1957, Jerome Hill). ♦ Through Nov. 23: The films of Isabelle Huppert. Nov. 2 at 8:15: "Madame Bovary" (1991, Claude Chabrol; in French). ♦ Nov. 3 at 6: "Rosebud" (1975, Otto Preminger). ♦ Nov. 3 at 8:30: "The Story of Piera" (1983, Marco Ferreri; in Italian). ♦ Nov. 7 at 6: "Cactus" (1986, Paul Cox). ♦ Nov. 7 at 8:15: "Clean Slate" (1981, Bertrand Tavernier; in French). ♦ "Italian Discovery: Antonio Capuano." All films are in Italian. Nov. 4 at 6 and Nov. 5 at 8:15: "Vito and the Others" (1991). ♦ Nov. 4 at 8:30 and Nov. 6 at 5:30: "Pianese Nunzio, Fourteen in May" (1996). ♦ Nov. 5-6 at 1: "Red Moon" (2001). ♦ Nov. 5 at 4 and Nov. 6 at 3:30: "Napoli's Dust" (1998). ♦ Nov. 5 at 6: "Mario's War" (2005).

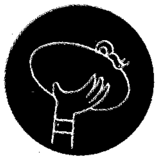
MUSEUM OF THE MOVING IMAGE
35th Ave. at 36th St., Astoria (718-784-0077)—Repertory nights. Nov. 4-5 at 7:30 and Nov. 6 at 6:30: "Citizen Kane" (1941, Orson Welles). ♦ "Some Like It Wilder: The Complete Billy Wilder." Nov. 5 at 1:30: "The Spirit of St. Louis" (1957). ♦ Nov. 5-6 at 4:15: "The Private Life of Sherlock Holmes" (†). ♦ Nov. 6 at 1:30: "Witness for the Prosecution" (1957).

SUNSHINE CINEMA
143 E. Houston St. (212-330-8182)—Midnight movies. Nov. 4-5: "Star Trek II: The Wrath of Khan" (†).

THALIA THEATRE
Symphony Space, Broadway at 95th St. (212-864-5400)—Special screening. Nov. 2 at 7 and 9:30: "Running in High Heels" (2005, Maryann Manelski). ♦ "Children in the 20th Century." Nov. 6 and Nov. 8 at 6 (double feature): "La Promesse" (1996, Jean-Pierre Dardenne and Luc Dardenne; in French) and "The Bicycle Thief" (1948, Vittorio De Sica; in Italian).

WALTER READE THEATRE
Lincoln Center (212-875-5600)—Through Nov. 10: "A Centenary of Chinese Cinema." All films are in Mandarin. Nov. 2 at 1 and Nov. 5 at 1:30: "Myriad of Lights" (1948, Shen Fu). ♦ Nov. 2 at 3:15, Nov. 3 at 1:30, and Nov. 5 at 6:15: "This Life of Mine" (1950, Shi Hui). ♦ Nov. 3 at 3:30 and Nov. 5 at 3:45: "Family" (1957, Chen Xihe and Ye Ming). ♦ Nov. 4 at 2 and Nov. 6 at 8: "The Red Detachment of Women" (1961, Jin Shan). ♦ Nov. 4 at 4:10 and 9: "Serfs" (1963, Li Jun). ♦ Nov. 5 at 8:30 and Nov. 7 at 1:30: "Early Spring in February" (1963, Xie Tieli). ♦ Nov. 6 at 1:30 and Nov. 7 at 3:45: "The Legend of Tianyun Mountain" (1980, Xie Jin). ♦ Nov. 6 at 4 and Nov. 8 at 3:30: "Yellow Earth" (1985, Chen Kaige). ♦ Nov. 6 at 5:50: "On the Beat" (1995, Ning Ying). ♦ Nov. 7 at 6:15 and Nov. 8 at 1:15: "Springtime in a Small Town" (2002, Tian Zhuangzhuang). ♦ "On Set with French Cinema: Bruno Dumont." Nov. 4 at 6: "The Life of Jesus" (1997, Bruno Dumont; in French), followed by a discussion with Dumont.

TABLES FOR TWO
UOVO



175 Avenue B (212-475-8686)—*Uovo* is Italian for egg, and a large photo of one adorns a bare brick wall in Matthew Hamilton's spare, stiffly stylish restaurant. As it happens, Hamilton cooks eggs beautifully—delicately scrambled with frisée or poached and dropped in a hearty soup of Portuguese sausage and garlic—but they don't dominate the menu any more than prunes dominate the menu at Prune, the tiny but successful restaurant where Hamilton used to cook.

The cuisine is part American (brisket, succotash), part southern European (salt cod), and the menu is divided, Italian style, in three; the human stomach is really designed to fit only two of these courses, but each section has its temptations. Two particularly striking starters of late were a salad of watercress, sheep's cheese, and lamb's tongue sliced so thin that its texture seemed almost mushroomy and an adventurous cold almond soup. Of the second courses, a standout was octopus, grilled in typical Mediterranean style but served with pickled burdock root. (House-pickled vegetables line a shelf above the bar.) More puzzling were the ricotta dumplings—pale, floury, and tinged with lemon zest, they tasted like cake batter.

Hamilton's way with meat, as at the offal-rich Prune, tends to be extreme. The brisket with coffee-infused barbecue sauce was a huge hunk of beef, as tall as it was wide, marbled with fat and cooked to a tender consistency. Similar, but less successful, was the whole suckling pig with citrus glaze, which turned out to be a slightly mushy heap. Such calorie-laden heartiness can be welcome, especially with the onset of winter, but elsewhere Hamilton demonstrates a more interesting talent for subtle flavors and unusual combinations. A fillet of hake, for instance, was served in broth, with clams and fava beans, and the fish of the day, almost invariably Mediterranean bass, was grilled plain with only lime and a few herbs.

Some things haven't been ironed out yet. A very nice bottle of Rioja arrived at the table unaccountably cold one evening, and there can be a certain serenity to the service. But this is serious, adventurous cooking and it seems to be attracting a clientele to match. On recent nights, people at most tables were excitedly passing their plates around, making slightly self-conscious pronouncements on each dish. (Open Mondays through Saturdays for dinner, and Sundays for brunch and dinner. Entrées $16-$24.)

—*Leo Carey*

READINGS AND TALKS

JEAN BAUDRILLARD
The French cultural theorist and philosopher makes a series of free appearances in connection with the publication of "The Conspiracy of Art," his new anthology that includes the essays "The Viral Economy," "Pataphysics," and "War Porn." Nov. 1 at 6:30: Baudrillard and his publisher and editor Sylvère Lotringer consider "The Pataphysical Challenge." (The French House, Columbia University, Broadway at 116th St.) Nov. 2 at 7: Baudrillard

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talks with Lotringer about the new anthology. (Tilton gallery, 8 E. 76th St.) Nov. 4 at 6: Baudrillard and Lotringer in a discussion titled "The Parallax of Evil: Domination and Hegemony." (The New School, 66 W. 12th St.)

"CONVERSATIONS WITH CARTOONISTS"
The longtime *New Yorker* cartoonist David Sipress interviews his colleague George Booth. (Dixon Place, 258 Bowery, 212-219-0736, ext. 106. Nov. 2 at 7:30.)

"GIANTS ACROSS THE DIVIDE"
Frank Bidart, David Gewanter, Saskia Hamilton, Michael Hofmann, and Christopher Ricks read from and discuss the letters and poems of Robert Lowell and Ted Hughes. (The Graduate Center, City University of New York, Fifth Ave. at 34th St. For more information, call 212-254-9628. Nov. 2 at 7:30.)

"POETS OF THE NON-EXISTENT CITY"
To celebrate the opening of its new exhibit about the writers of Los Angeles during the McCarthy era, Poets House presents a discussion with the poets Gene Frumkin, Estelle Gershgoren Novak, and Mel Weisburd and the scholars Kimberley Bird and Tom Viertel, followed by a reading by the poet Naomi Replansky. (72 Spring St., 2nd fl. 212-431-7920. Nov. 4 at 6:30.)

NEW YORK INSTITUTE FOR THE HUMANITIES
The symposium "What Exactly Is Going On There in the Dark?" examines the phenomenology of going to the movies. The philosophy professor Colin McGinn, whose latest book is "The Power of Movies: How Screen and Mind Interact," will join the editor Walter Murch (his work includes "Apocalypse Now," "The English Patient," and the new movie "Jarhead," portions of which will be screened), the critic Molly Haskell, and the neurologist, director, and "Beyond the Fringe" comedy-troupe veteran Jonathan Miller. The writer Lawrence Weschler will moderate. (Cantor Film Center, New York University, 36 E. 8th St. 212-998-2100. Nov. 5 at 7.)

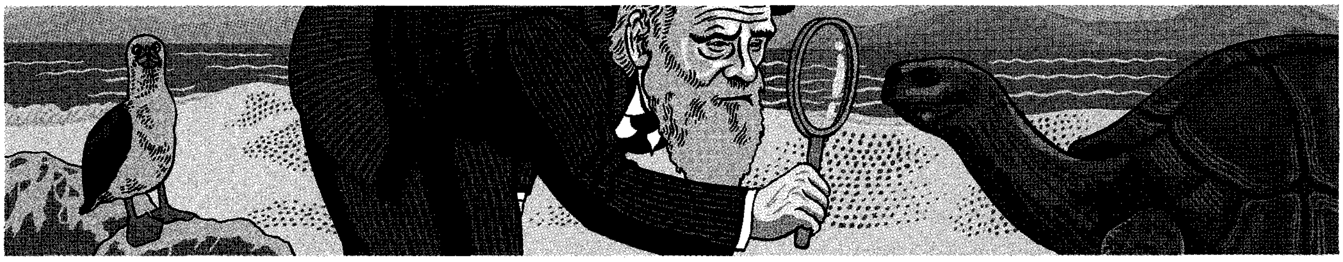
JIM NUTT AND PETER SAUL
The two post-Pop painters and friends take the stage to help celebrate the release of the fourth volume of *The Ganzfeld,* an annual survey of visual culture. They'll be talking with the artist David Sandlin and Dan Nadel, the editor of *The Ganzfeld.* (Lang Center, Parsons The New School for Design, 55 E. 13th St. No tickets necessary. Nov. 6 at 7.)

ABOVE AND BEYOND

MAHRAJAN AL-FAN FESTIVAL OF ARAB ARTS
This three-day gathering includes a reading on Nov. 4 at 7 by the noted mystical poet Adonis (the Graduate Center, City University of New York, Fifth Ave. at 34th St.), a concert on Nov. 5 (see Night Life—the World Music Institute), and a night of theatre on Nov. 6 at 7:30, with the Arab-American collective Nibras and the Palestinian actor Mohammad Bakri presenting, respectively, a drama about Arab women titled "The Details of Silence" and a one-man show called "Pessoptimist." (Symphony Space, Broadway at 95th St. For more information about the festival, call 212-545-7536.)

NEW YORK CITY MARATHON
The city's marathon is the largest in the world (36,562 competitors crossed the finish line last year), but when the race was inaugurated, thirty-five years ago, only fifty-five runners completed the course, which at that point was contained entirely within Central Park. The marathon now runs through all five boroughs, giving participants a complete tour of the city and giving residents and fans ample opportunities to cheer. This year, the men's field includes the recent winner of the Boston Marathon, Hailu Negussie; the returning champion, Hendrick Ramaala; the New York City course record holder, Tesfaye Jifar; and Paul Tergat, who holds the world record of two hours, four minutes, and fifty-five seconds. (Nov. 6, with the wheelchair athletes starting at 8 A.M., the professional women at 9:35, and the professional men and general public at 10:10. For more information, visit www.ingnycmarathon.org.)

AUCTIONS AND ANTIQUES
"Robe Jaune et Robe Arlequin," a work in oil and pencil from 1941 by Matisse, is one of the highlights in Part One of **Sotheby's** sale of Impressionist and modern art on Nov. 2, which also includes such impressive works as Monet's "Le Grand Canal" (1908) and Léger's "Les Constructeurs" (1950). (Part Two is held the following day.) The house then moves back to the realm of the celebrity auction, offering European furniture and decorative arts (including a stunning array of Fabergé eggs) from the collection of Lily and Edmond J. Safra on Nov. 3-4. (York Ave. at 72nd St. 212-606-7000.) ♦ **Christie's** expansive sale of Impressionist and modern art concludes on Nov. 2, coinciding with a sale of works on paper from the same period. The evening sale of postwar and contemporary art on Nov. 8 features works from the collection of Lee V. Eastman, an attorney for de Kooning and other prominent artists. Eastman bought "with passion, a great eye, and spit," as his son recalled, and anyone who visits the exhibition will have difficulty disagreeing. The auction includes an important untitled de Kooning work from 1977, along with abstractions by Rothko, Guston, and Kline from the collection of Edward R. Broida. (20 Rockefeller Plaza, at 49th St. 212-636-2000.)



MICHAEL KUPPERMAN

ON THE HORIZON

DANCE
SMART MOVES
Nov. 17-20

The brainy and unpredictable downtown troupe Sally Silvers & Dancers will celebrate its twenty-fifth season at P.S. 122 with a set of premières, including "Puppy-Skills" and a solo for Silvers titled "Oven Rack." (212-477-5288.)

THE THEATRE
OFFICE CULTURE
Nov. 17-20

The French experimental troupe Grand Magasin hits St. Ann's Warehouse with "5th International Forum of Corporate Cinema," a deadpan onstage spoof of an instructional film on how to keep people happy in the workplace. (718-254-8779.)

ART
"DARWIN"
Nov. 19-May 29

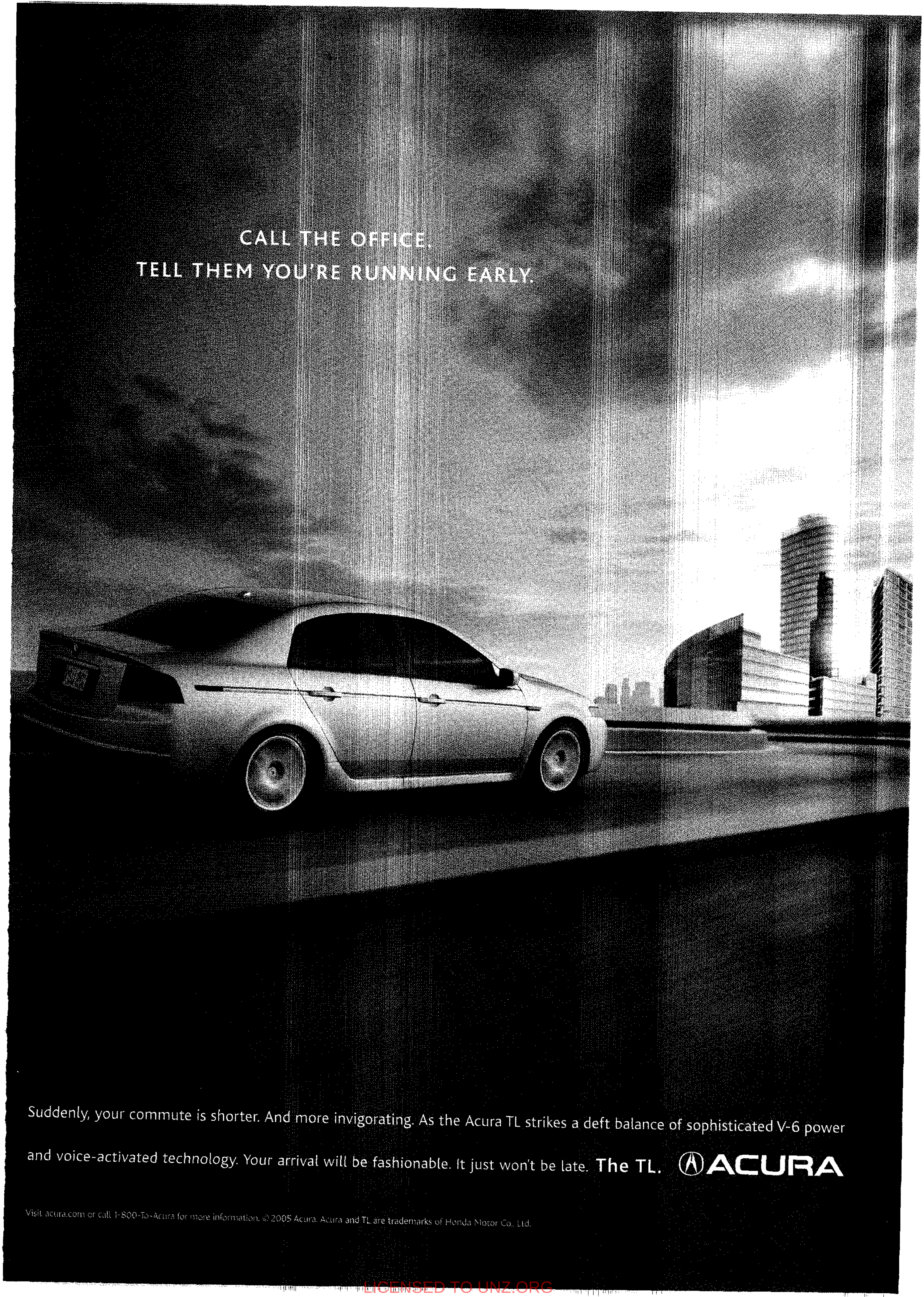
An exhibition at the American Museum of Natural History traces the discoveries and influence of the great naturalist (1809-1882); a re-creation of the scientist's study will be displayed alongside fossils he collected and living examples of tortoises, iguanas, and frogs that he saw on his eighteen-thirties voyage to the Galápagos Islands, the trip that led to his proposal of the theory of evolution. (212-769-5100.)

NIGHT LIFE
WHITE TRASH
Nov. 26

Forty years ago this Thanksgiving weekend, Arlo Guthrie was arrested for littering in Stockbridge, Massachusetts, an experience he made famous with the protest song "Alice's Restaurant." He rarely performs what he recently described as his "anti-idiot" song, but these are special times, and you can expect it this year at his annual holiday show at Carnegie Hall. (212-247-7800.)

CLASSICAL MUSIC
DREISER, IN OPERA
Dec. 2-28

A world première at the Metropolitan Opera is always the main event of the season. The fortunate composer this time around is the New York-born Tobias Picker, and his work is "An American Tragedy," which is based on the Dreiser novel and features such singers as Patricia Racette, Susan Graham, and Nathan Gunn; James Conlon conducts. (212-362-6000.)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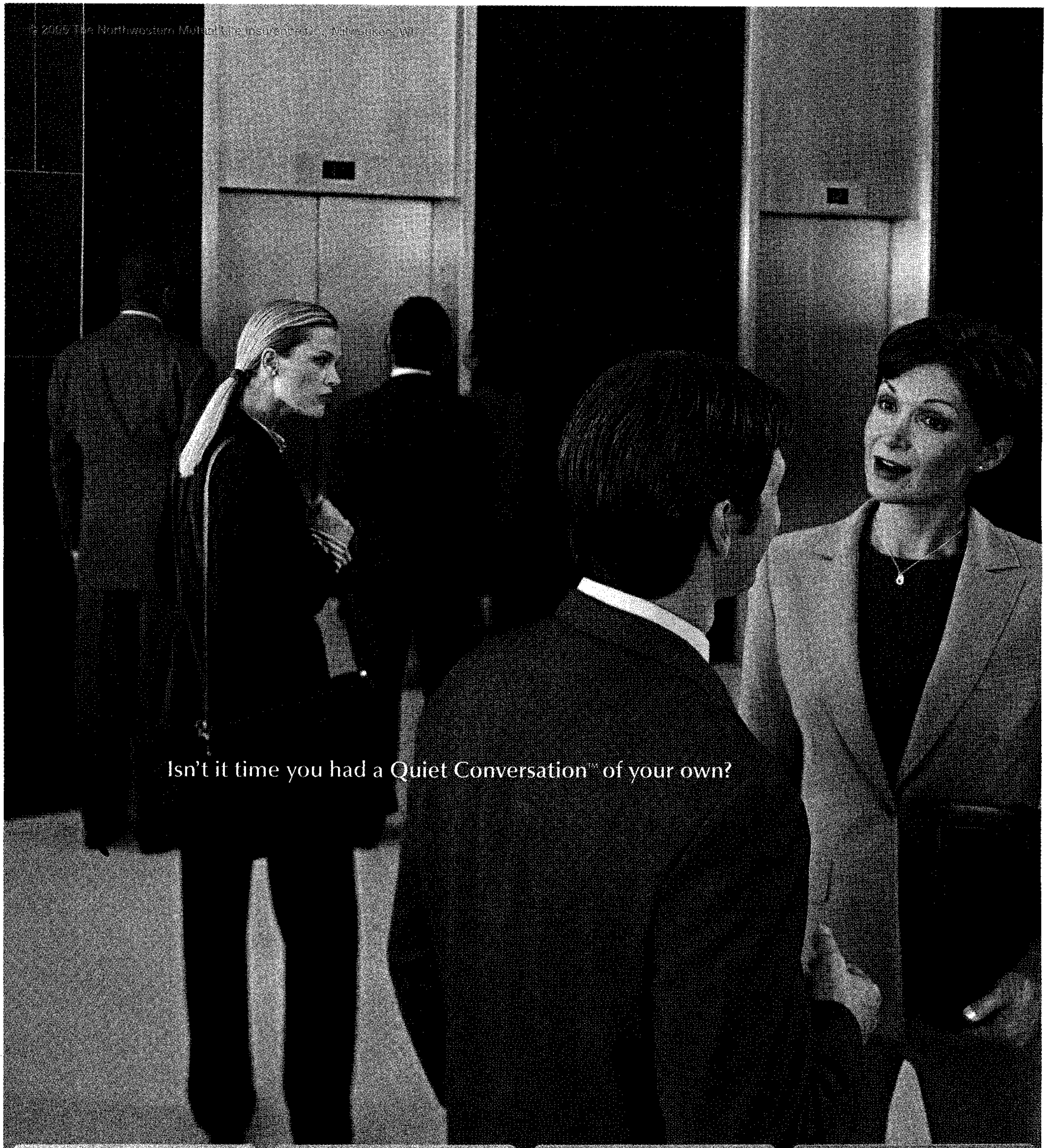
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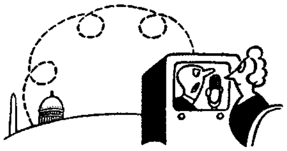
THE NEW YORKER

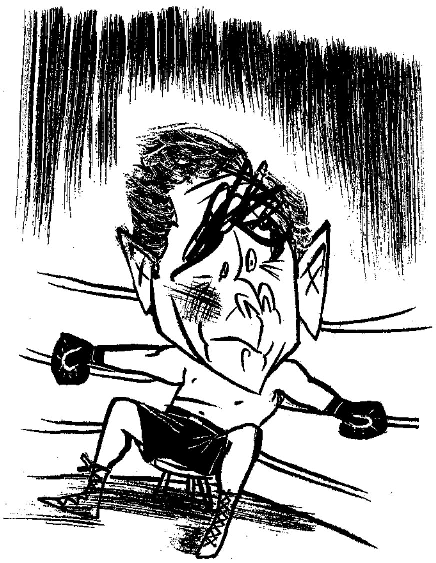
THE TALK OF THE TOWN

COMMENT
HELL WEEK



Last Monday, at the very start of George W. Bush's week of misery, Thomas M. DeFrank, the Washington bureau chief of the *Daily News*, published a story that portrayed the President as frustrated and enraged, a "peevish and melancholy" tenant of the Oval Office lashing out at everyone around him for the calamities of the recent past and the ones sure to follow. No one, not even the most loyal satrap, was safe from Bush's rages—not his close adviser Karl Rove, or Vice-President Dick Cheney, or Andrew Card, the chief of staff. "The only person escaping blame," one source explained, "is the President himself."

Naturally. A prominent feature of the last Presidential debates was Bush's refusal to own up to a single mistake. Self-searching is still not a part of his political or personal repertory. And yet the Administration's misery index has soared along with the price of gas. His ill-conceived Social Security reform bill is effectively dead; the insurgency in Iraq has undermined every moment of progress there and keeps alive the memory of all the wasted opportunities and arrogant decisions of the postwar period; and a hundred trips to the Gulf Coast will not erase the images, and the human cost, of Presidential fecklessness in the first days of Hurricane Katrina. As if by magic, Party regulars were suddenly decrying the emptiness at the core of things. Lawrence Wilkerson, Colin Powell's former chief of staff, publicly unloaded (three years too late) on the Bush Administration for "cowboyism" in its foreign policy, for the duplicitous marshalling and manipulation of intelligence to sell the invasion of Iraq, and, because the President is "not versed in international relations and not too much interested in them, either," a chilling dependency on the "Cheney-Rumsfeld cabal." Then, in an interview with Jeffrey Goldberg in these pages, Brent Scowcroft, the national-security adviser under George H. W. Bush, described one architect of the war, Paul Wolfowitz, as a utopian fantasist, and another, his old colleague Cheney, as changed beyond recognition.



As Hell Week commenced in earnest, the military announced the two-thousandth U.S. combat death in Iraq (more than eighteen hundred since the declaration of "Mission Accomplished"). Harriet Miers, who had declared the President the most brilliant man she had ever met, leaped loyally onto the trash heap of history as she recast her humiliation as a stalwart defense of executive privilege. And, on Friday afternoon, Special Counsel Patrick Fitzgerald stolidly laid out a five-count indictment of "Cheney's Cheney," the Vice-President's chief of staff, I. Lewis (Scooter) Libby, for making false statements to an F.B.I. agent, perjury before a grand jury, and obstruction of justice.

As the diminishment of Bush's political power has become plain, as his poll numbers have shrivelled, his Democratic detractors could be forgiven a moment of thinking, At last! Bush had been unmasked in all his insularity, hubris, and executive incompetence. While Fitzgerald described the utterly brazen way that Libby had constructed his lies about leaking Valerie Wilson's identity to the press, it was hard to forget the even more brazen way that Libby, Cheney, and the Pentagon's Office of Special Plans constructed lies and exaggerations about the state of Saddam Hussein's arsenal and his "links" to Al Qaeda.

But the lessons that Bush is likely to derive from the complex of recent disas-

ILLUSTRATIONS BY TOM BACHTELL

ters will not automatically lead to a more considered, modest, and moderate Presidency. The fact is that many of his newly emboldened critics are leading members of the true-believing conservative wing of the Republican Party, ideological radicals who saw Harriet Miers as the most underqualified crony to be nominated since the Truman Administration and could not bring themselves to believe the Administration's winks and nods hinting that she was ideologically—and theologically—One of Us. With the Miers nomination, a moment had arrived in which ideological devotion trumped partisan loyalty. No tactic was sufficient to woo the rebels in his camp. Cheney himself went on Rush Limbaugh's radio show in an attempt to seduce him with personal assurances, saying he was confident that Miers "has a conservative judicial philosophy that you'd be comfortable with, Rush."

Very few in the conservative media were buying it. Charles Krauthammer, John Fund, George Will, John Podhoretz, Bruce Bartlett, Ann Coulter, Laura Ingraham, Ramesh Ponnuru, William Kristol, David Frum, and many others set out to scotch the nomination. Over the years, the purists could absorb some of Bush's departures from the conservative creed—the Medicare prescription-drug legislation, a campaign-finance bill—but they would not countenance a failure to replace Sandra Day O'Connor, a "swing vote" on the Court, with a jurist in the mold of Antonin Scalia or Clarence Thomas.

Meanwhile, with Miers reportedly fumbling badly through her practice "murder boards" in preparation for Senate hearings, and with tried-and-true conservatives like Senator Sam Brownback, of Kansas, turning up their noses at her, the vote count was dubious. Finally, it fell to Charles Krauthammer, writing in the Washington *Post,* to suggest a suitably effective, if entirely disingenuous, exit strategy to the White House: withdraw the nomination and say it was all about guarding the sanctity of White House documents. "Faces saved," Krauthammer prescribed. "And we start again."

Ronald Reagan, in the midst of his faltering second term, tried to restore some integrity and order to his Administration during the Iran-Contra scandal by bringing in as chief of staff one of the G.O.P. establishment grandees, Howard Baker—a move that also helped moderate American foreign policy to the point where Reagan found, to the benefit of history, a common language with a reformer in the Kremlin, Mikhail Gorbachev. Part of Bush's vanity—and his Oedipal drama—is that he has modelled himself on Reagan and not on his father, but it is hard to imagine him cleaning house the way Reagan did in 1987 and moving toward the center. In fact, it is even harder these days to *locate* a centrist establishment in the Republican Party. The conservative insurgency that took shape in the think tanks, congressional offices, and activist groups of Washington a quarter century ago now inhabits the core of the Party. In his anger, and after all his many failures, the President, quite suddenly, seems unpopular, alone, and adrift. Thirty-nine months—five months more than John F. Kennedy's entire Presidency—remain in the second term of George W. Bush.

—David Remnick

CLOSE READING DEPT.
SCOOTER'S SEX SHOCKER

Of all the scribbled sentences that have converged to create the Valerie Plame affair, the most remarkable, in literary terms, may belong to Scooter Libby, Dick Cheney's recently deposed chief of staff. "Out West, where you vacation, the aspens will already be turning. They turn in clusters, because their roots connect them. Come back to work—and life," he wrote in a jailhouse note to Judith Miller. Meant as a waiver of confidentiality, the letter touched off the sort of fevered exegesis more often associated with readings of "The Waste Land" than of legal correspondence. For even more difficult prose, however, one must revisit an earlier work. "The Apprentice"—Libby's 1996 entry in the long and distinguished annals of the right-wing dirty novel—tells the tale of Setsuo, a courageous virgin innkeeper who finds himself on the brink of love and war.

Libby has a lot to live up to as a conservative author of erotic fiction. As an article in SPY magazine pointed out in 1988, from Safire ("[She] finally came to him in the bed and shouted 'Arragghrrorwr!' in his ear, bit his neck, plunged her head between his legs and devoured him") to Buckley ("I'd rather do this with you than

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play cards") to Liddy ("T'sa Li froze, her lips still enclosing Rand's glans . . .") to Ehrlichman (" 'It felt like a little tongue' ") to O'Reilly ("Okay, Shannon Michaels, off with those pants"), extracurricular creative writing has long been an outlet for ideas that might not fly at, say, the National Prayer Breakfast. In one of Lynne Cheney's books, a Republican vice-president dies of a heart attack while having sex with his mistress.

It took Libby more than twenty years to write "The Apprentice," which is set in a remote Japanese province in the winter of 1903. The book is brimming with quasi-political intrigue and antique locutions—"The girl who wore the cloak of yellow fur"; "one wore backward a European hat"—that make the phrase a "former Hill staffer," by comparison, seem straightforward.

Like his predecessors, Libby does not shy from the scatological. The narrative makes generous mention of lice, snot, drunkenness, bad breath, torture, urine, "turds," armpits, arm hair, neck hair, pubic hair, pus, boils, and blood (regular and menstrual). One passage goes, "At length he walked around to the deer's head and, reaching into his pants, struggled for a moment and then pulled out his penis. He began to piss in the snow just in front of the deer's nostrils."

Homoeroticism and incest also figure as themes. The main female character, Yukiko, draws hair on the "mound" of a little girl. The brothers of a dead samurai have sex with his daughter. Many things glisten (mouths, hair, evergreens), quiver (a "pink underlip," arm muscles, legs), and are sniffed (floorboards, sheets, fingers). The cast includes a dwarf, and an "assistant headman" who comes to restore order after a crime at the inn. (Might this character be autobiographical? And, if so, would that have made Libby the assistant headman or the assistant headman's assistant?)

When it comes to depicting scenes of romance, however, Libby can evoke a sort of musty sweetness; while one critic deemed "The Apprentice" "reminiscent of Rembrandt," certain passages can better be described as reminiscent of *Penthouse Forum*. There is, for example, Yukiko's seduction of the inexperienced apprentice:

> He could feel her heart beneath his hands. He moved his hands slowly lower still and she arched her back to help him and her lower leg came against his. He held her breasts in his hands. Oddly, he thought, the lower one might be larger. . . . One of her breasts now hung loosely in his hand near his face and he knew not how best to touch her.

Other sex scenes are less conventional. Where his Republican predecessors can seem embarrassingly awkward—the written equivalent of trying to cop a feel while pinning on a corsage—Libby is unabashed:

> At age ten the madam put the child in a cage with a bear trained to couple with young girls so the girls would be frigid and not fall in love with their patrons. They fed her through the bars and aroused the bear with a stick when it seemed to lose interest.

And, finally:

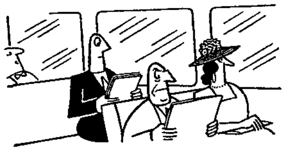
> He asked if they should fuck the deer.

The answer, reader, is yes.

So, how does Libby stack up against the competition? This question was put to Nancy Sladek, the editor of Britain's *Literary Review*, which, each year, holds a contest for bad sex writing in fiction. (In 1998, someone nominated the Starr Report.) Sladek agreed to review a few passages from Libby. "That's a bit depraved, isn't it, this kind of thing about bears and young girls? That's particularly nasty, and the other ones are just boring," she said. "God, they're an odd bunch, these Republicans." Unlike their American counterparts, she said, Tories haven't taken much to sex writing. "They usually just get caught," she said.

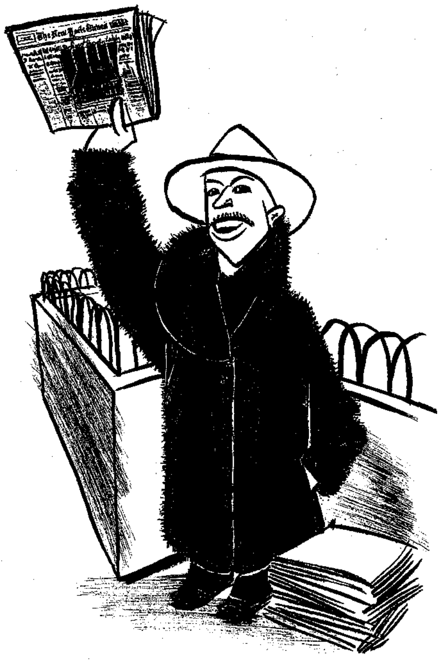
—*Lauren Collins*

EXTRA!
SELLING THE NEWS



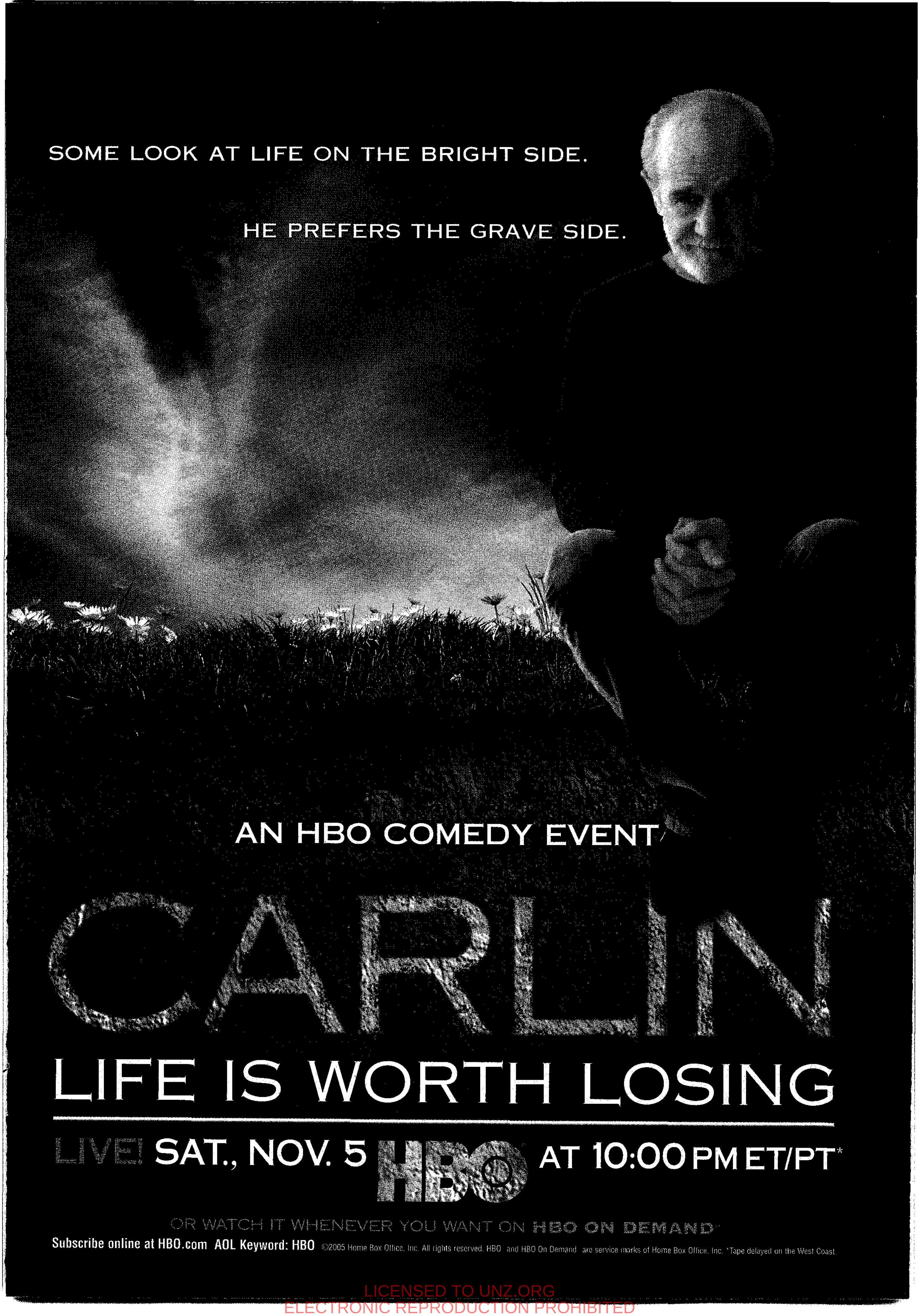
It is sometimes said that the best way to read the *Times* is to start by skimming the *Post*, as though it were a cheat sheet for deciphering the paper of record's impassive headlines and byzantine constructions. Then, there is the current Presidential approach, which is to skip the *Times* and other papers altogether, in favor of a news précis compiled by one's staff—a personalized answer key.

For those without a staff, and without the time or the patience to muddle through more than one paper, there is Carlos, a young man of indeterminate origin and background ("I'm from everywhere and nowhere," he says), who, for the past several months, has stood at the southwest corner of Forty-second and Eighth, by the entrance to the Port Authority Bus Terminal, greeting evening commuters with a simple one-line digest of the latest in world affairs: "Bush nominates a lady with zero experience to the highest court in the land!" or, "Archeologists find proof that Jews existed!" Carlos is one of about two dozen men stationed in the area each afternoon who offer morning newspapers at half price, but he seems to be alone among the venders in his old-fashioned conviction that the news must be sold rather than simply bought.



Carlos

Unlike his forebears, the old barking newsboys with their evening editions, Carlos, who wears a fedora and a neatly trimmed mustache, has no "Extra!" for anyone to read all about. He relies on his ability to cut through the blather, pinpointing essential truths that busy nine-to-fivers may have missed over their morning coffee. "Most regular people are at least as smart as the media, so I tell them something that compliments their intelligence," he says. As often as not, that something comes from the inner reaches of the paper—from Op-Ed or the Science Times—not A-1 above the fold. ("I call these the fluff stories," he said recently, looking at a midweek front page.)



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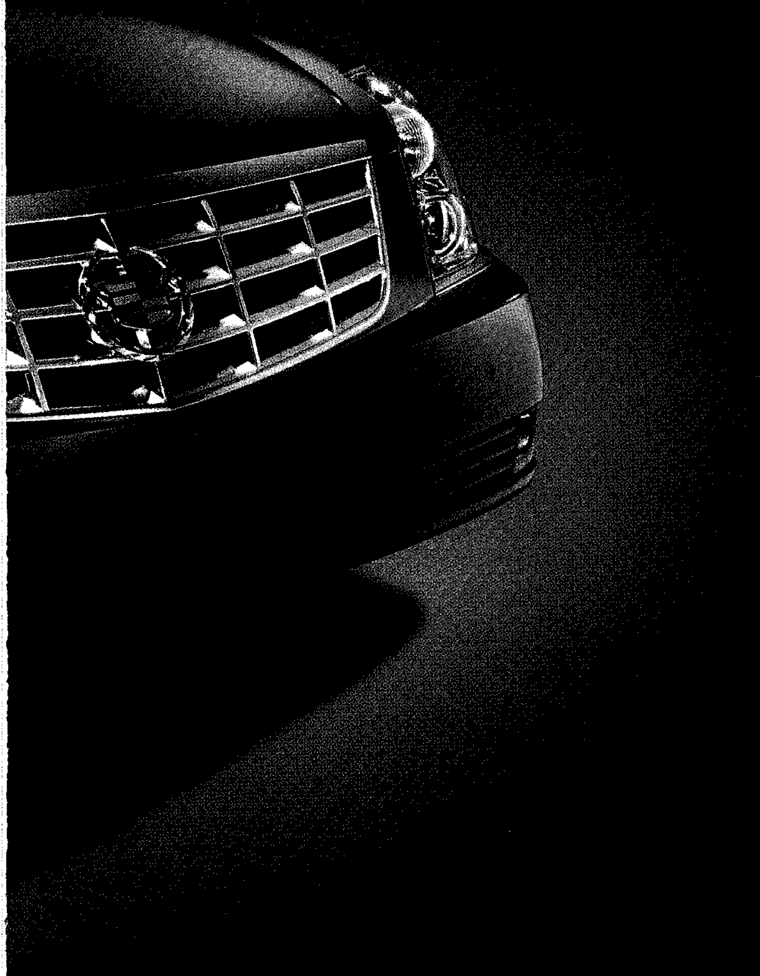

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The other day, just after 3 P.M., Carlos arrived at his spot, at the junction of two planters, pushing a hand truck stacked with about a hundred copies of the *Times* and the *Wall Street Journal*, each bearing an official pink stamp with the words "Afternoon Copy." He was wearing a fur coat, cinched at the waist with a sash, and leather sandals. A man in a baseball cap that read "Shady" stood fifteen feet away, next to a stack of the *News*, glumly holding up a copy with the headline "A-ROD'S GRIEF."

Carlos picked up the A section of the *Times* and scanned the headlines: an update on the Iraqi constitution ("Boring"), a report on stem-cell research ("That clicks, because you got two sides, the religious and the non"), a feature about a troubled Bronx Medicaid clinic ("No way—it's health care, plus no one cares about the Bronx"). "This is where they hide the good stuff," he said, turning to the table of contents. Refco, the White Sox, Scooter Libby. Finally, he paused at an item about the Vatican. "Oh, the Pope—I have the most fun with him," he said. A month ago, Carlos sold every copy by using the line "Pope says it's O.K. for gay priests to have sex with other gay priests!"

"Looks like a story on page A-11," he said, his eyes lighting up. "There's a violent riot in the middle of the United States." (He was referring to a small A.P. article about an aborted Nazi Party march in Toledo.)

The light changed, and a swell of commuters surged toward him. "More than one hundred people get hurt in race riot in America!" Carlos shouted. "Half price. New York *Times*. Half price!"

"Pimpin' jacket, man," a passerby said. No one stopped.

Carlos tested a few variations on the theme—"New race riot hits America," "New race riot breaks out in America." Reactions were mixed: laughter, hostile glares, and the occasional searching glance at the paper's cover (which was dominated, unhelpfully, by a photo from Kashmir).

A toothless man who'd been loitering nearby stepped up to mimic Carlos: " 'Bush gets caught by C.I.A. with a transvestite. Half price.' That'll sell, right?"

A female commuter approached. "You're a good screamer," she said. "Do you want a tip, so you won't get hoarse at the end of the day? Remember to lift your uvula, by pulling your tongue back about an inch."

Eventually, the *News* guy sold all of his papers: for a quarter, A-Rod's grief evidently seemed like better bus reading. "If it gets near seven and I still have a ton left, I start experimenting—I go to the obituaries," Carlos said. A couple of months ago, after Sonny Hertzberg, a Knicks player from the forties, died of heart failure, Carlos announced, "One of the world's most famous basketball players dies!" He smiled as he recounted the coup. "People stopped like they were having a heart attack," he said. " 'Michael Jordan died?' 'Magic Johnson?' "

It was now six-fifteen: too early for desperation. "Race riot breaks out in America!" Carlos shouted again, as a fresh crowd crossed the street.

A young black man looked back over his shoulder, shrugged, and muttered, "That ain't news," before continuing on his way.

—*Ben McGrath*

AIR QUALITY REPORT
THAT SMELL

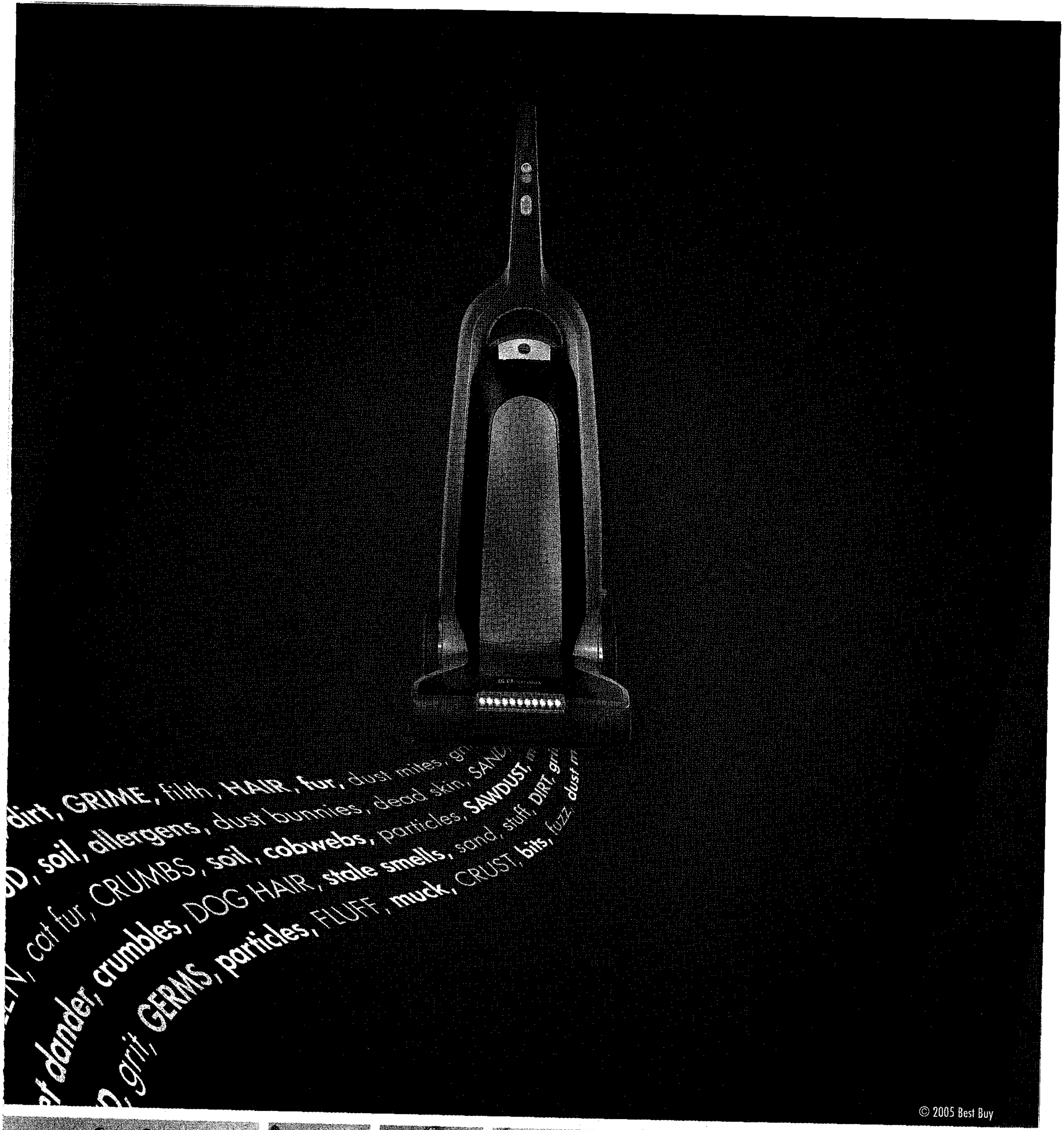
It's a well-known fact, among real-estate agents, that prospective buyers respond enthusiastically to the smells of cinnamon and baking dough. Brokers often instruct sellers to put an apple pie in the oven just before showing an apartment. This ploy came to mind last Thursday evening, when the smell of maple syrup unaccountably permeated the entire metropolitan area. Reports came in from Harlem to Hackensack, from Greenpoint to Greenwich Village, that the air smelled sweet. By morning, with plausible explanations in short supply, elaborate theories had begun to take shape—everything from bioterrorism of some kind to "Eggo-terrorism," as someone wrote on the blog Gothamist. So, the real-estate hypothesis: Recently, the market has cooled off. Perhaps, in a collective stroke of capitulation, the city's legions of frustrated sellers decided to try the pie trick, except that, because of a seasonal glut of maple products from New England, they chose to make hotcakes instead. According to this premise, when a real-estate bubble bursts, it smells like syrup.

Then, there was the peak-foliage theory, which took into account the fact that the wind that evening was coming from the northwest—out of the highlands of New York and New Jersey, where the maples have been shedding their leaves. Could all those trees, amid autumnal rot, somehow emit the scent of Aunt Jemima? "No," said Sumner Dole, a forester at the University of New Hampshire. "There's absolutely nothing with respect to the tree that would give you that smell. Something might've got into the atmosphere and you might have had an inversion-type situation."

As for what that might be, Dole guessed that it must be the fumes from something sugary—molasses, caramel—which seemed sensible enough, on the eve of Halloween. "What you need to think about is something from a commercial industrial process," he said. It so happened that the people at the city's Office of Emergency Management, in concert with the Police Department, the Fire Department, the Coast Guard, the Department of Environmental Protection, and the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, were thinking the same thing. (Testing had ruled out an airborne toxic event; there was nothing unusual in the air, such as, say, benzoic acid, which apparently can give off a maple-syrup odor.) By late Friday morning, according to Jarrod Bernstein, an O.E.M. spokesman, officials were sampling the air at a chocolate factory in downtown Manhattan: Jacques Torres Chocolate Haven, on Hudson Street. "It's just not us. I'm so sorry," Kris Kruid, a Chocolate Haven representative, said. "We're not doing anything smelly. Of any kind." Sure enough, by midafternoon the O.E.M. had cleared Chocolate Haven and was once again flummoxed.

Perhaps it makes sense that a citizenry accustomed to strange odors, and inured to foul ones, would detect a sweet one (or one, at least, that they associate with sweetness) and call the authorities. But the fear, such as it was, seemed to give way to a feeling of good fortune, as though we'd been visited by invisible aliens from a planet where breakfast is served twenty-four hours a day—a place, in fact, not unlike this one.

—*Nick Paumgarten*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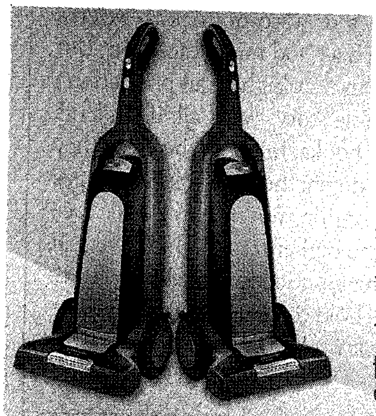

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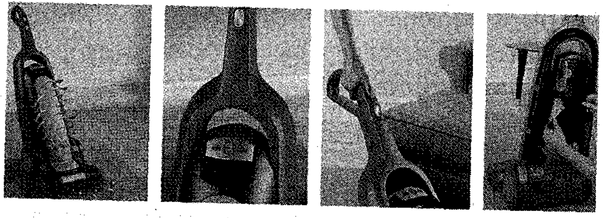

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THE FINANCIAL PAGE

CLASS ACTION

"I don't care who writes a nation's laws—or crafts its advanced treaties—if I can write its economic textbooks," Paul Samuelson, a Nobel-winning M.I.T. economist and the author of the most durable economics textbook ever written, once said. There's a business corollary to this: over the past two decades, growing school attendance and rising book prices have made textbook publishing more lucrative than ever. College students now spend more than five billion dollars a year on textbooks, while states spend another four billion on books for elementary and high-school students. And the revenue is not being spread around: five publishers account for eighty per cent of new college-textbook sales in North America.

But dominance has its discontents, and textbook publishers are routinely denounced as price gougers. The average price of a book is around fifty dollars, and many, particularly in the sciences, will run you well over a hundred. A General Accounting Office report released this summer found that, since 1986, prices have risen at a pace of six per cent a year—double the rate of inflation. For critics, such numbers are proof that the publishers are manipulating the market. The dearth of competition in the business is an issue, but the fundamental cause of the price spiral is what economists call an agency problem: professors pick the textbooks, but students have to pay for them.

Patricia Schroeder, the head of the Association of American Publishers, has said that college professors are "among the best educated and most sophisticated consumers in America." But sophisticated means one thing when you're spending your own money, and another when you're effectively spending your students'. When professors decide which books to assign, the main consideration, they would say, is quality, not price, so any competition occurs on the basis of features rather than of cost. The G.A.O. report placed much of the blame for soaring prices on what it called "enhanced offerings," all the CDs and instructional supplements with which textbooks are increasingly bundled—or burdened. When price is no object, professors might as well choose the fanciest textbook around.

A few idealistic souls have proposed alternatives to the current system. Ian Ayres, a professor at Yale Law School, has proposed that colleges could buy the books; people in the open-source movement have talked of producing free textbooks, the way they currently produce free encyclopedias and free software. But, until the revolution arrives, college students must bear the burden of the high cost of reading. It may be a losing fight as long as professors keep picking texts, but the students are waging it in a surprisingly canny way.

ANATOMY
101

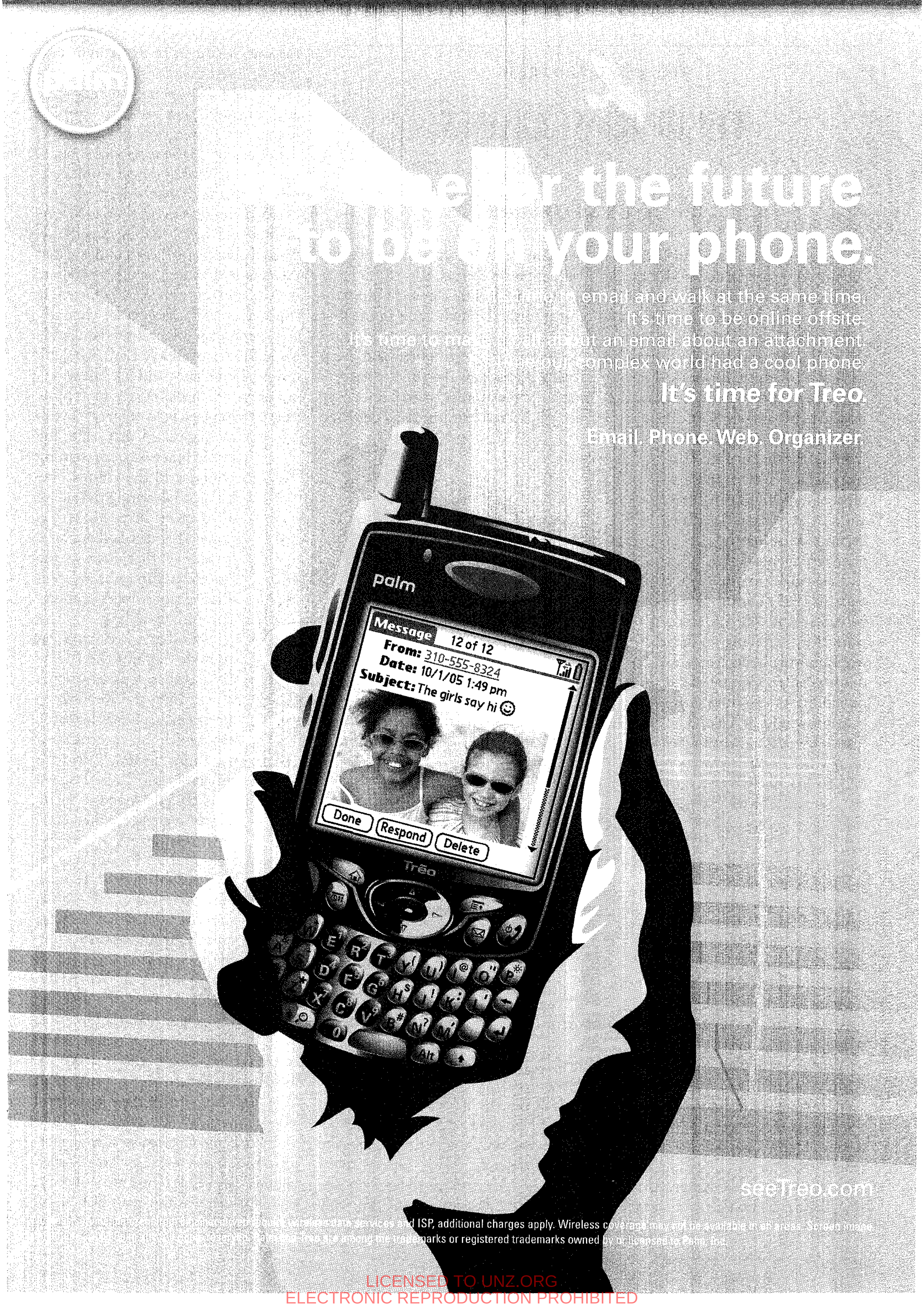
To begin with, students arbitrage international prices. You can often buy the same textbook abroad for significantly less than it costs in the U.S., so students have learned to buy directly from places like the U.K., and a host of small businesses have sprung up to import books. (Unhappy publishers have responded by labelling editions "Not for Sale in North America" and by prohibiting foreign distributors from selling in bulk to Americans.) More commonly, of course, students buy used books. The used-textbook market is huge—close to two billion dollars last year—and it has expanded recently, thanks to a host of Web sites that give students access to buyers and sellers around the country. You can generally buy a book for seventy-five per cent of the retail price, and sell it back for fifty per cent. If you do that, it only costs you a quarter of the cover price to own the book for a semester.

Publishers, naturally, loathe used books and have developed strategies to depress the secondhand market. They bring out new, even more expensive editions of popular textbooks every three to four years, in a classic cycle of planned obsolescence. (The "enhanced offerings" of modern textbooks have a similar function; if using the online extras requires a registration code, the resale value of a textbook goes down.) Revision cycles were once longer, but used books have been eating deeper and deeper into publishers' profits. The G.A.O. report cites one publisher who says that revision cycles at his firm are pegged explicitly to sales revenues: falling sales means it's time for a new edition.

Yet even when a professor assigns an expensive textbook, students are remarkably good at gaming the cycle of revisions. For instance, the economists Austan Goolsbee and Judith Chevalier, in a study of more than a thousand colleges, found that the year before a textbook is revised new-book sales drop sharply. That's because a textbook in its final year is significantly less valuable, since you won't be able to resell it. In other words, before nineteen-year-olds decide to buy a textbook, they consider not just the use they'll get from it but also its current price, the probable future demand for it, and perhaps whether they can blow off the reading entirely. Funnily enough, they're acting in what economists would call textbook fashion. And that serves as a check on publishers, who know that if they revise too frequently they could end up losing sales.

This doesn't mean that the textbook market is a free market the way the market for PCs or automobiles is—that's why it's such a good market to be in. But it does mean that high retail prices don't tell the whole story. After all, if students resell their books, in effect the price they pay comes down; the textbook companies may be charging more partly to take account of the higher resale value. The real losers in this game are those who buy textbooks and hold on to them: graduate students, bookworms, and lazy people.

—James Surowiecki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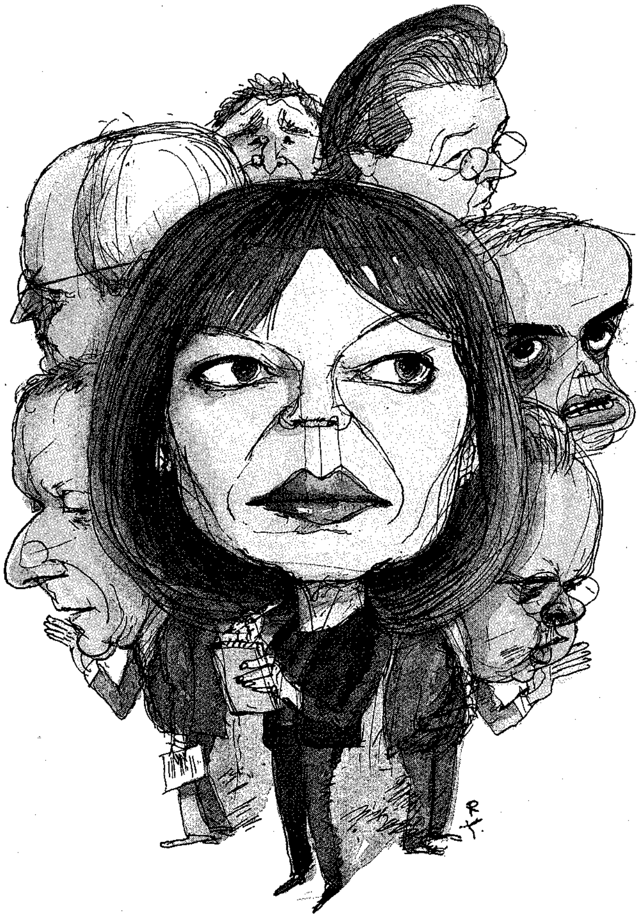
TELLING SECRETS

How a leak became a scandal.

BY NICHOLAS LEMANN

It's probably safe to assume that nobody who participated in the outing of Valerie Plame Wilson as a C.I.A. agent, in the summer of 2003, was mindful that the result of the process—the publication of Wilson's name in Robert Novak's syndicated column—might be a federal crime. The law that makes it one was passed in 1982, in response to the murder of the C.I.A.'s station chief in Athens, Richard Welch, after the turncoat agent Philip Agee and his journalistic allies began publishing the names of covert agents. It has been successfully invoked only once, in 1985. The people involved in the Wilson affair were thus behaving as they would normally behave, and not as people cognizant of the possibility of criminal prosecution would behave. The Justice Department investigation, which began in the early fall of 2003, and which a special counsel, Patrick Fitzgerald, took over that December, last Friday produced the indictment on five charges, including perjury, obstruction of justice, and making false statements, of Lewis Libby, Vice-President Cheney's chief of staff, who resigned. It has also exposed a particularly light-resistant aspect of the dealings between journalists and their sources in Washington.

When Novak published his column, on July 14, 2003, the aftermath of the military conquest of Iraq hadn't become the disaster that it seems to be today. A distinct edge of disappointment had entered discussion of the war, though, because the main public rationale for it—that Saddam Hussein had a store of deadly weapons—hadn't been proved. Saddam's armed forces had collapsed with impressive speed, but why did that matter, if he hadn't posed a military threat to the United States in the first place? So the war's supporters, especially inside the Administration, were feeling surprisingly defensive, considering how little time had passed since May 1st, when President Bush had delivered his jaunty shipboard "Mission Accomplished" speech.



Judith Miller was friendly to foreign-policy conservatives.

RICHARD THOMPSON

The Valerie Plame affair is an especially rich episode in the larger story of the Iraq war, and nothing about the war completely makes sense without the establishment of two preconditions. First, Saddam's arsenal was only one of a number of possible reasons for the war. Members of the Administration believed that Saddam was developing deadly weapons, but they were also convinced that Saddam's hostility to the United States and his oppression of his own people were reasons enough. There was another, and I think central, argument for war, which was often heard in private conversations in Washington, but which was only recently addressed publicly by President Bush: that the conquest of Iraq would inaugurate the vast and urgent project of forcefully countering the influence of violently anti-American Islamic fundamentalists in the Arab Middle East. Saddam's history, his villainy, and his past weapons programs made Iraq the most plausible location for a bold military move in the region. In that sense, the whole business of presenting evidence to the United Nations and declaring the failure of weapons inspections was stagecraft. Stagecraft has to be persuasive; that was why the Administration was so upset that weapons didn't immediately turn up in Iraq.

The other precondition that helps to explain the Plame affair is that, long before the war in Iraq, the Republican foreign-policy world had been engaged in an internal war over how seriously to take threats to the United States and how to respond to them. Thirty years ago, when conservatives were vigorously dissenting from President Nixon's policy of détente with the Soviet Union and China, the young Dick Cheney, quietly, from a position on the White House staff, and the young Paul Wolfowitz, openly, from a position in the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency, sided with the conservatives; Libby, who was Wolfowitz's protégé when he was a student at Yale, has also been on the conservative side for years.

In time, the conservative foreign-policy position generated a vigorous subculture. Life inside it had many charms, one of which was the unassailability of the conservatives' ideas (since, until Iraq,

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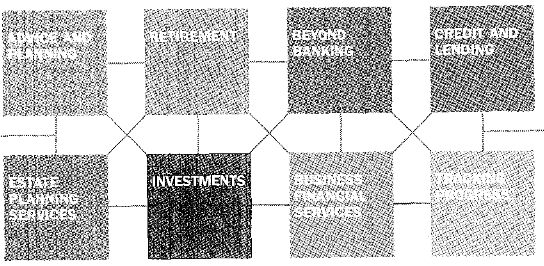
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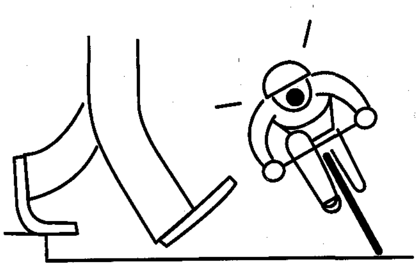
their side had never won the policy debate, these ideas were untested). Conservatives were smarter, bolder, more strategic-minded, and more historically aware than moderate Republicans, being less vitiated by the need to appease interest groups and by the grind of running bureaucracies. When the Central Intelligence Agency or the State Department, let alone the United Nations, was mentioned in conversation with a foreign-policy conservative, the reference would usually draw a derisive chuckle or a rolling of the eyes: those organizations had been captured by the appeasers, and could be counted on to respond insufficiently to threats.

In the late summer of 2002, President Bush, by most accounts having already decided to invade Iraq, elected to seek U.N. support. That was a victory for Colin Powell, the Secretary of State, and a defeat for Vice-President Cheney and the other foreign-policy conservatives. The existence of weapons of mass destruction would provide the casus belli, since they would prove that Saddam had ignored a series of U.N. resolutions ordering him to disarm. Powell's dramatic, and now discredited, presentation of evidence about Saddam's weapons at the U.N., in February, 2003, with the director of the C.I.A., George Tenet, sitting at his side, represented the subjugation of the State Department and the C.I.A. to their conservative enemies, who, we now know, had helped to produce most of the material that Powell used in his briefing.

Joseph C. Wilson IV, Valerie Plame's husband—a career State Department official, married to a C.I.A. agent—was not a comforting figure to conservatives. Wilson had served for fifteen years as an officer in the Foreign Service; in 1991, he was the chargé d'affaires in Baghdad and had been outspoken in opposition to Saddam. In 1992, he was named Ambassador to Gabon and São Tomé and Príncipe by President George H. W. Bush. By the late spring of 2003, as Wilson emerged as an off-the-record war critic in Washington, he was definitely playing for the other team. He had offered a skeptical view of the prewar intelligence to selected journalists, most notably Nicholas Kristof, of the *Times*, and Walter Pincus, of the Washington *Post*. He told them that, in February, 2002, in response to a request from Cheney to the C.I.A., he had been sent to Niger to investigate the charge that Saddam had bought uranium that could be used in the manufacture of nuclear weapons, and that he had come back without any solid evidence. Nevertheless, in January, 2003—two months before the start of the war in Iraq—the nuclear allegation wound up in Bush's State of the Union Message. First Kristof, on May 6, 2003, and then Pincus,on June12th, published versions of Wilson's story, identifying him only as a retired Ambassador; on June 19th, the *New Republic* published online a story in which an unnamed Ambassador "knew the Niger story was a flat-out lie." Wilson then cast off his anonymity and, on July 6th, published the Niger story himself, on the *Times*' Op-Ed page. In doing this, he had violated not just the conservatives' First Commandment—never underestimate a threat—but also the First Commandment of an unusually tough and loyalty-obsessed Administration: never embarrass the President. Even worse, from Cheney's point of view, Wilson had constructed a situation in which, indirectly but unmistakably, the Vice-President had embarrassed the President.

In the late nineteen-seventies, around the time that the current generation of foreign-policy conservatives was coalescing in Washington, a new idea about the press corps was forming, too. Vietnam and Watergate had discredited the old ideal of the Washington-establishment reporter, who dined with top officials, and who was proud to be a part of the governmental process. Instead, reporters would be muckraking outsiders, who put before the public the truth about their government, which they would have got from courageous, obscure sources. In this new scenario, people who anonymously gave information to reporters were good guys; high Administration officials, who were likely to be bad guys, were merely press-conference purveyors of the party line. It was on this theory that many state legislatures in the nineteen-seventies passed laws protecting the reporter-source relationship—laws that gave journalists an officially enhanced legal and professional status, premised on their implicit opposition to officialdom.



But Congress never passed such a law; and in 1972, in a 5–4 decision, the Supreme Court had ruled that the First Amendment does not protect a reporter from having to testify before a grand jury. During the past few years, prosecutors and judges have shown themselves to be increasingly impatient with the idea that journalists have special privileges. Meanwhile, in Washington, the old journalistic way of doing business had not, it turned out, actually vanished from the scene along with the Alsop brothers and Walter Lippmann. Government officials still attempt to use the press to gain advantage, and they still use anonymous leaks as well as scripted scenes. Even the press-resistant Bush White House leaks. Editors still want their reporters to get access to top officials, in the hope of finding information that their competition doesn't have. Especially in the small world of foreign policy and national security, the reporters and columnists for the leading news organizations tend to be assigned to their beats semipermanently, and to have close, confidential relationships with officials. This is no less the case today than it was in the Clinton Administration; it's just that a different set of journalists (Charles Krauthammer, for example) have the better access. In the end, the chummy imperatives of Washington trumped the press's independent self-conception.

So when Joseph Wilson emerged as a significant enemy of the Administration—according to the indictment, Libby had him fingered by late May of 2003—it was business as usual for the Administration to try to discredit him, and to use the press in the struggle. Although the person who originally published the name of Wilson's wife, Robert Novak, is a classic pre-Watergate type—a journalist of many decades'

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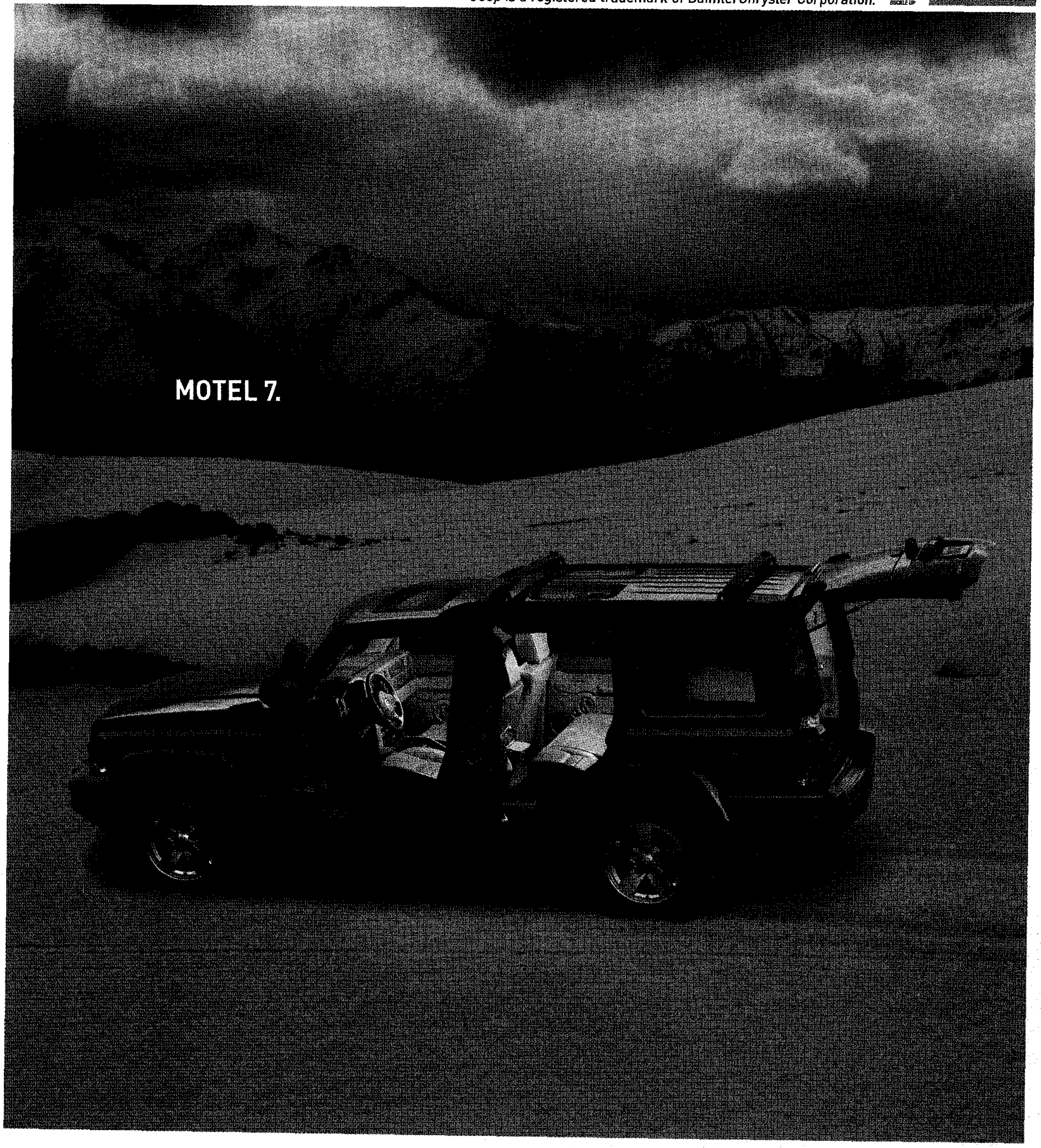

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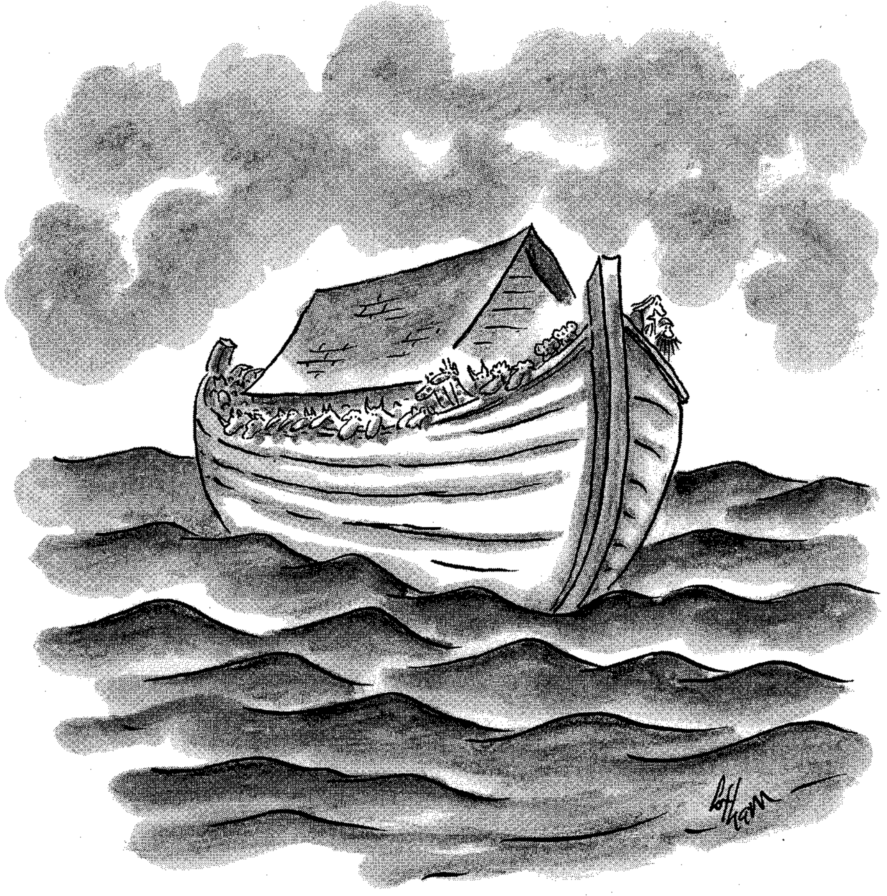


"When the waters subside, the problem's going to be mold."

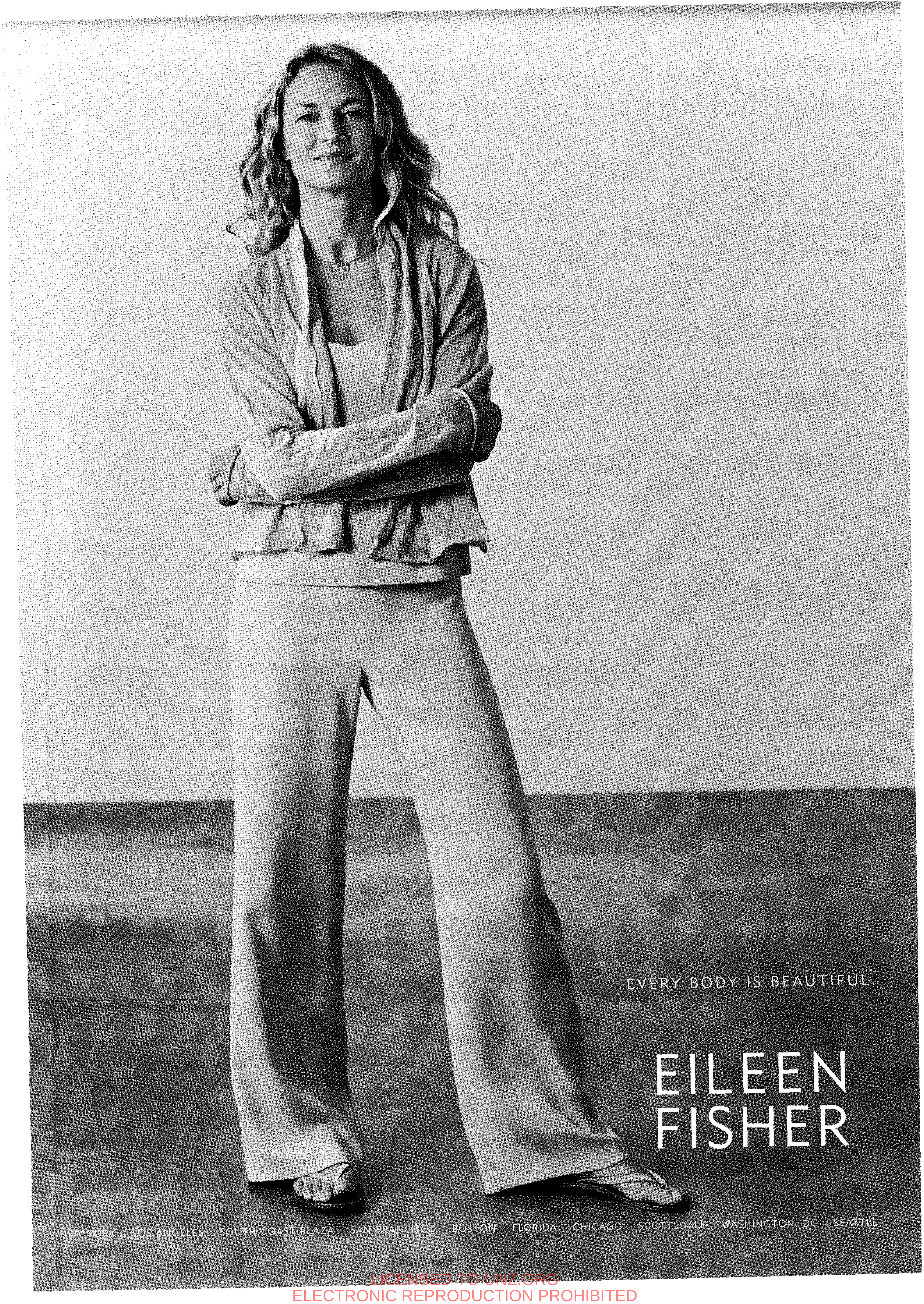
standing, and friendly to the Administration—the effort to discredit Wilson's story reached far past the conservative press, to include, for example, a veteran national-security reporter whose work was skeptical of the Administration's estimate of Saddam's capabilities (Walter Pincus) and a political reporter with no discernible foreign-policy inclination (Matthew Cooper, of *Time)*, who is married to a prominent Democratic operative (Mandy Grunwald, a consultant to the Clintons). Fitzgerald has given us a glimpse of a venerable process in Washington journalism, presented in all its splendid disorganization, confusion, and self-interest.

When it was pointed out that Novak had possibly broken the law by naming Plame in his column—that he had exposed a covert American agent—the Administration, perhaps hoping to quiet the self-righteous storm that immediately broke out, called for an official investigation. The result has damaged not just the Administration, which last week saw one of its highest-ranking members indicted, but also the press. Here was a case where talking to the press was precisely the crime being investigated; where the anonymous sources were not whistle-blowers taking on an Administration but an Administration taking on whistle-blowers; where the reporters were not lonely crusaders but members of the journalistic establishment; and where the law seemed to be on the side of the prosecution.

Bush himself, eager to avoid the appearance that he might be covering anything up, ordered everyone in the Administration to coöperate fully with the investigation. Novak had a strong incentive to testify: he could have been charged with a federal crime. Two of the major news organizations involved, the Washington *Post* and NBC News, appear to have sized up the case as a poor occasion for making a stand. Tim Russert, of NBC, and two *Post* reporters, Pincus and Glenn Kessler, gave testimony to the grand jury investigating the leaks. The two other news organizations involved, *Time* and the *Times*, decided to resist Patrick Fitzgerald's grand-jury subpoenas.

According to Matthew Cooper, he worked on the story during a weeklong frenzy in early July, 2003, which was sparked by a White House announcement that it could no longer stand behind Bush's State of the Union assertion that "[t]he British government has learned that Saddam Hussein recently sought significant quantities of uranium from Africa." In brief telephone conversations with Karl Rove, Bush's deputy chief of staff, and Lewis Libby on successive days, Cooper, promising both men anonymity, asked them about the bad information. The name of Joseph Wilson, who had just published his Op-Ed piece, immediately came up. From Cooper's account, it appears that Rove and Libby were trying primarily to protect their bosses—Bush and Cheney—and only secondarily to contradict Wilson; both cited Wilson's wife in order to make the point that it was she, not the C.I.A. or Cheney's office, who had sent Wilson to Niger. The Administration's message seemed to be that Wilson, far from being so important that the Vice-President would turn to him, was so unimportant that his wife was scrounging around to find freelance assignments for him. A version of that sort of thing—impugning an Administration's critic—must surely occur every week, on some issue or other.

As is often the case in press manipulation, White House operatives did not make the initial contacts with reporters. Rove and Libby didn't call Cooper—he called them. But they took his calls, and it seems more than purely accidental that they both noted that Wilson's wife worked for the C.I.A. and had a hand in his mission to Niger. When Libby was called to testify before the investigators, he said, under oath, that he had learned Valerie Plame Wilson's name from reporters, rather than their having learned it from him. Perhaps he was betting that Fitzgerald couldn't get the people who could dispute his account to testify, but he was wrong. This past summer, three days after the U.S. Supreme Court re-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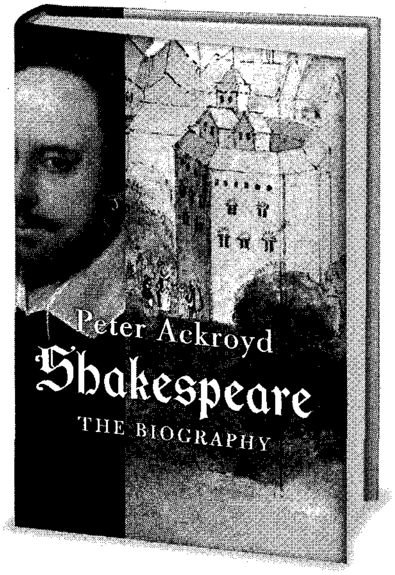

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fused to hear an appeal by *Time* and the *Times*, the editor in chief of Time Inc., Norman Pearlstine, turned over Cooper's note to the special counsel. In mid-July, Cooper appeared before the Fitzgerald grand jury.

Judith Miller, the *Times* reporter who has emerged as a central figure in the Plame investigation, is a different story. She seems to have spent more time on Wilson and Plame than any other reporter, but she never published an account in the *Times;* and, of six reporters whom Fitzgerald subpoenaed, she is the only one to have resisted to the extent of going to jail rather than reveal a source. In 2003, though, what set her apart as a reporter was an attitude of open friendliness toward the foreign-policy conservatives' position within the Administration. How the White House treated her shows the advantages given to a reporter who functions as a member of a team inside government; how the *Times* treated her shows how much leeway there is for investigative reporters who occasionally produce spectacular results that bathe their news organizations in institutional glory. (Miller was on a team of journalists that won a Pulitzer Prize in 2002 for explanatory reporting on the global terror network.)

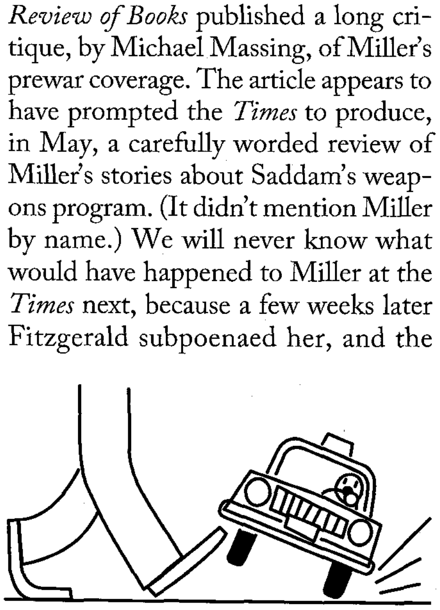
I hardly know Miller, but it says something about her that I remember clearly the first time we met. It was in the summer of 1976, just after I had moved to Washington; a friend of mine was living in a mansion in the Kalorama section which a childless couple had bought and then taken in boarders to help pay for. My friend and Miller were two of the boarders; the place had the feeling of a left-wing safe house, where you could have dinner with people who'd just visited Cuba. Miller, who was then a freelance writer on the verge of being hired by the *Times*, was not so much ideological as eager to let you know that she travelled in a world of international intrigue and important people—the sort of person who was always conducting hushed, urgent telephone conversations. By the time of the Valerie Plame affair, though, she was plainly a hawk. Miller's book "Germs," co-written with her *Times* colleagues Stephen Engelberg and William Broad and published just after the September 11th attacks, took the position that the United States was not being aggressive enough in pursuing chemical- and biological-weapons research, leaving the field open to the bad guys. Her instincts led her to stories about dire threats to the United States from abroad—threats that she believed were met by official complacency from the national-security bureaucracies. During the run-up to the Iraq war, her byline appeared on major *Times* stories that seemed to confirm the Administration's view of Saddam's weapons capabilities.

In the late spring of 2003, Miller was in a peculiar position at the *Times.* The paper's top editors, Howell Raines and Gerald Boyd, were under intense pressure after the spectacular misdeeds of one reporter, Jayson Blair, set off a rebellion against their leadership. (They resigned in early June.) The institution was in turmoil. Miller's direct superior, Douglas Frantz, the head of the *Times'* investigative-reporting team, had defected in May for the Los Angeles *Times;* no replacement had been named yet, so Miller didn't really have a boss. Miller's own reporting had come into question, because no evidence of Saddam's weapons of mass destruction had turned up in Iraq. By a process outside the *Times'* ordinary negotiations with the Pentagon, she had arranged to have herself embedded with a military-intelligence unit that was scouring Iraq for evidence of Saddam's weapons program. In April, in a story that was widely mocked, she reported that an unnamed Iraqi scientist, whom she had seen from a distance but not spoken to, had pointed out sites to the Americans where weapons material had been removed "only days before the war began." After Miller returned to New York, in June, the *Times*, acutely aware that before the war it had been generally credulous of the Administration's claims about Saddam's weapons program, assigned a team of reporters to reëxamine the prewar intelligence. Miller says that she was a member of this team; her bosses say that she wasn't. Her byline did not appear on the team's story, which was published on July 20th. Instead, she wrote a companion piece, reporting on the unsuccessful postwar hunt for weapons.

It was during this period that Miller interviewed Lewis Libby three times. Her account, though, leaves unclear who proposed the first meeting, and what Miller had told Libby she was working on. Miller says that she had asked Jill Abramson, the *Times*' Washington bureau chief at the time, for permission to write about Joseph and Valerie Wilson and was refused; Abramson, now a *Times* managing editor, says that Miller never asked. It was not for lack of initiative or cleverness that Libby failed at his mission, which was to get the Administration's version of the Wilson story into the *Times*. He simply hadn't realized how rapidly Miller's stock was falling at the paper.

Miller's account of her activities in the late spring and the summer of 2003 is full of blank spots. For instance, she failed to mention her first meeting with Libby—a sit-down interview in his office—until after she was released from jail, this past September, and found her notes. But every damning detail about Miller that emerges also damns the *Times*. It's clear that, however good her reporting had been in the past, by the summer of 2003 the top editors at the newspaper were looking for places to park her where she could not do any harm and might take the hint and leave. It was like a bad marriage that never ends.

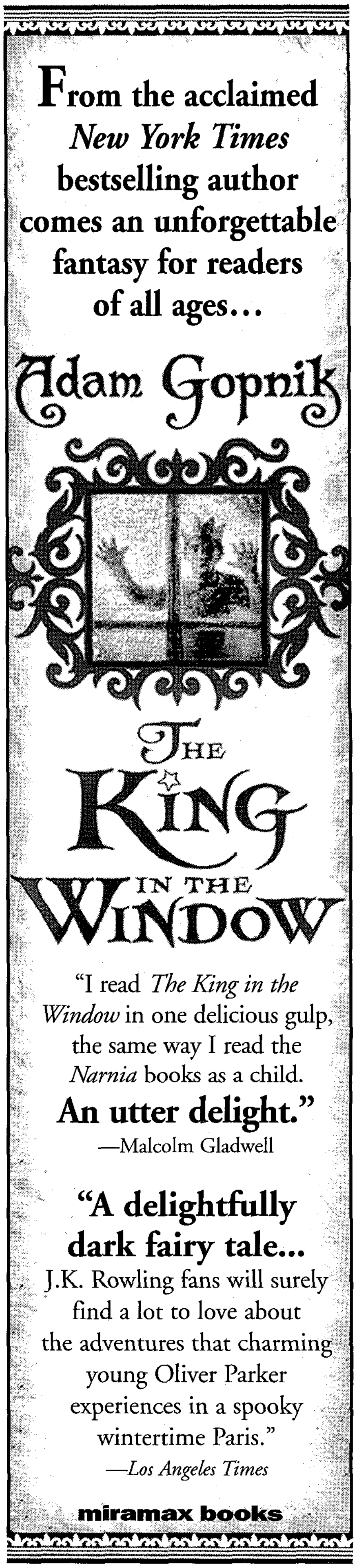
In February, 2004, the *New York Review of Books* published a long critique, by Michael Massing, of Miller's prewar coverage. The article appears to have prompted the *Times* to produce, in May, a carefully worded review of Miller's stories about Saddam's weapons program. (It didn't mention Miller by name.) We will never know what would have happened to Miller at the *Times* next, because a few weeks later Fitzgerald subpoenaed her, and the paper decided to mount a full-throated defense of a reporter's right to protect anonymous sources. Surprisingly, it seems that nobody in the *Times* management sat down with Miller and went through her notes of the interaction with Libby, or grilled her about the details of her work on Wilson and Plame; for more than a year, the paper was in the position of having to defend her as a prosecutorial target, however much the paper's top editors, Bill Keller and Abramson, mistrusted her as a reporter.



Miller's decision, in late September, to leave jail after eighty-five days and testify before Fitzgerald's grand jury presumably was not what the *Times* had in mind. Skeptics at the paper think that the rigors of jail, combined with the urging of Miller's personal lawyer, Robert Bennett, in favor of a deal, wore down her resistance. Miller explained that she had decided to testify because Libby had convinced her that he was sincere in releasing her from a promise to keep him anonymous. But, by Miller's own account, another important reason for her testimony was that Fitzgerald had agreed to ask her only about Libby, and no other source, when she appeared before the grand jury.

The agreement left Miller an opening to say that she couldn't remember who had first mentioned Valerie Plame's name to her. What could Fitzgerald do at that point? Time was running out for his grand jury, and he could ask Miller only about Libby. Thus Miller was able to protect whichever of her sources—maybe Libby, maybe somebody else—who had first mentioned the name Valerie Plame. While Miller was in jail, Libby sent her a lyrical, cryptic letter in which he wrote about the aspens out West, connected at the roots, and urged her to "come back to work—and life." He seemed to be indicating that, in Cheney's circle, she would be accorded a loyalty that she might no longer be able to expect from the *Times*.

Although the paper made an immediate public show of support—Keller; Floyd Abrams, the *Times*' lawyer; and the paper's publisher, Arthur Sulzberger, Jr., were photographed with her when she appeared at a federal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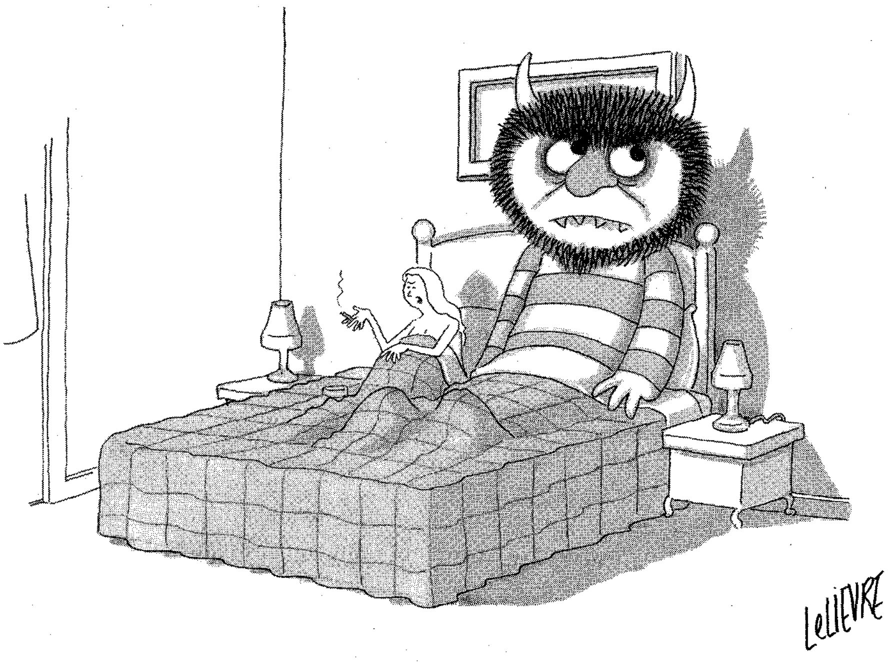
courthouse in Washington—the anger toward Miller that had been building up inevitably erupted. By late October, the paper was experiencing a fever of self-obsession and recrimination. First, a team of reporters and Miller published lengthy, side-by-side accounts that contradicted each other on several key points. Then the introverted Keller, who happened to be visiting *Times* bureaus in Asia as the controversy grew more intense, offered some rueful reflections to the *Times* staff via e-mail; it was clear that his true feelings about Miller were anything but supportive. Then two *Times* columnists—Maureen Dowd and the public editor, Byron Calame—weighed in, with strong anti-Miller views. Miller fired back with e-mails to Calame and Keller that were fiercely self-justifying; she called Keller's memo "ugly." The newsroom on West Forty-third Street seemed as distracted as it had been during the Jayson Blair incident. The *Times'* problems entailed not just the Miller affair but a falling stock price, layoffs, and relations among its top executives that were rather complicated, since Sulzberger had initially chosen Raines rather than Keller for the job that Keller now occupied. The *Times* has very quickly gone from fending off accusations that it was being insufficiently transparent to committing the reputation-impairing transgression known to American teen-agers as T.M.I.: too much information.

It was painful, if you love the press, to watch Patrick Fitzgerald doggedly break down the resistance of some of the country's best news organizations and succeed in getting reporters to reveal confidential sources. Fitzgerald's record was six wins and no losses, and there is no question that the cause of legally protecting the reporter-source relationship, which was not in great shape when the Plame story began, is in worse shape now. (Despite congressional testimony by the journalistic dramatis personae in favor of a federal shield law for reporters, it has no chance of passing.)

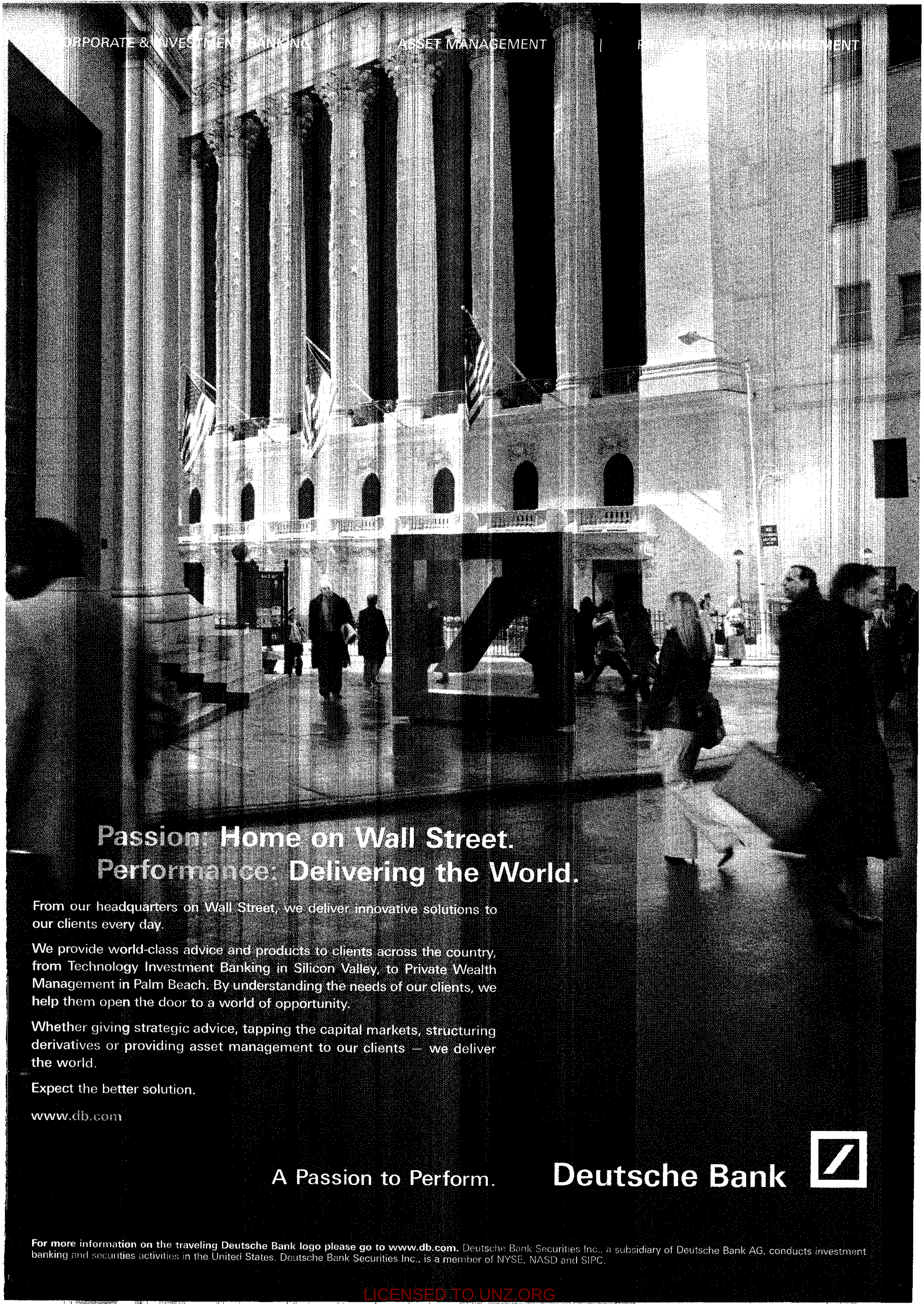
Still, it is possible to extract some good for journalism from this riveting mess. Long before the Plame case, any reporter focussing on politics and government surely would have experienced a bit of cognitive dissonance regarding the official rhetoric about the relationships between journalists and their sources. A reporter receives a continuous stream of confidential information—most of it from self-interested parties, and much of it as overtly unpleasant as the White House's leaks about Joseph Wilson. Even low-level whistle-blowers, alas, are more often cranks than heroes. Actually, in this case the press performed quite admirably, in the sense that nobody, with the exception of Robert Novak, published Plame's name. The news organizations involved in the White House leaks ended up treating them as what they were—another attempt to propagate negative information about a political enemy—and taking a pass. That's what usually happens.

The press's reflexive self-justifications tend to present all reporters and all anonymous sources as disinterested public servants. The unlovely process of official leaking and journalistic competition is substantially motivated by the players' lust for short-term advantage—for spin and for scoops. But, in the end, this process can, and does, produce a version of the activities of government which is very different from the official version. Even though many of the transactions don't look very good individually, the peculiar and continuous traffic between reporters and their sources is valuable to society. It deserves protection.

Now that Fitzgerald's grand jury has issued an indictment of a major Administration official, attention will shift quickly away from the press and toward the many troubles of the Bush White House. For the prosecutor, forcing reporters to testify about their sources was just a means to the end of indicting Libby. Yet it would be too comforting to conclude that this was a onetime disaster for the press which will never be repeated. Judith Miller managed to combine two types of Washington reporter in one person, and to embody some of the disadvantages of each: she is both the crusading muckraker with strong beliefs (though they're not the beliefs of many of her colleagues) and the insider with confidential access to the powerful. This double aspect of Miller is what made her so influential in the period before the war in Iraq began. Apart from Judith Miller, though, Washington journalists continue to applaud themselves for producing inside stuff, and also for having passions strong enough to chase down hidden information. There may never be another case with novelistic detail this good, but it's only a matter of time before another prosecutor gets an occasion to demonstrate that he doesn't buy the press's version of itself. ♦



"Let's face it—this was never going to work. You're a beloved children's-book character, and I'm a lesbian."



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PENSÉES D'AUTOMNE

BY IAN FRAZIER

It's fall again, and time for putting on my big, heavy boots and stomping on acorns. My boot of choice is a shin-high Danner Foothill model with a Vibram sole and a hard rubber heel a good inch and a quarter tall. Not many acorns will stand up to these fellows. The heel is the important part. Like a golf club or a tennis racquet, each heel has a "sweet spot" that sends a feeling of rightness through your whole body when the acorn is struck properly. This spot is in the middle of the heel, toward the back, in line with the center of the leg coming down into the boot. Hit a single acorn just so and you get a satisfying, shivery tingling between the shoulder blades. Hit a series of acorns, first right, then left, then right, and so on as long as the random distribution of acorns on the sidewalk permits, each acorn struck square on the sweet spot, *crunch*, *crunch*, *crunch*, never breaking stride—well, that's what you're looking for.

The town in suburban New Jersey where I live is ideal for doing this. Hundreds of oak trees, tens of thousands of acorns. Right about now the acorns are everywhere, piling up on the sidewalks and along the curbs, raining down and bouncing off people's heads when the wind blows. Freshly fallen ones are rich autumnal shades of Rembrandt brown or dark olive (among others), and their pale tops, just separated from their cupules, are clean as a new sheet of stationery. The small, brown acorns come from the pin oak, and the larger, olive acorns from the red oak. The larger acorn compresses underfoot with a meaty, splintery impact that leaves a roughly circular flattened self about the size of a dollar pancake. The smaller acorn, early in the season, when still at prime ripeness, gives off when stomped a sharp little report like a shot from a cap pistol. Sometimes I prefer the one, sometimes the other.

I am not the only person around here who stomps on acorns, though I'm probably the only adult. In the mornings, I see schoolchildren bent like Sherpas under their enormous backpacks nevertheless veering back and forth to stomp any available acorn in their paths. There are usually not many unstomped acorns in the vicinity of schools. Fortunately, the town has miles of slate sidewalks, which are lightly travelled. The sidewalk plates tilt this way and that over the tree roots, and many pedestrians and joggers and people pushing baby strollers prefer to use the smoother street pavement beside the curb—ergo, more acorns for me. Nobody seems to notice what I'm doing or pay me any mind. Maybe it just looks as if I'm walking erratically. Once, as I came stomping to a crosswalk, a woman on the passenger side of a big car waiting at the light rolled her window partway down and appeared to give me a nervous wave. When I approached closer, however, I saw that she had just opened a pack of cigarettes and was trying to get rid of the torn-off cellophane wrap, which had stuck to the ends of her fingers by static electricity.

This isn't stem-cell research—it's stomping on acorns. As Joe Garagiola, the sports announcer, used to say, "You don't want to be thinking too much out there." I admit that for a while I went at this with the mistaken notion that I was "working out frustrations." That was wrong, a too simple gloss and scrim over urges that go much deeper. Stomping on things that can be stomped on is an activity that humans have always done, whether frustrated or no. There's an acorn; you step on it. Splat. 'Nuff said.

True, it's hard to stay centered in the moment like that every second. There are distractions—the squirrels, for example, which (no doubt thanks to the acorns) infest the town. I know that Americans are now the fattest people on earth, but have you taken a look recently at American animals? Starlings and seagulls and raccoons have gotten so fat they can hardly move. Our town has squirrels with white bellies as broad across, proportionately, as Pavarotti's. These moguls chew holes at their leisure in plastic garbage-can lids, taking what they like from within. I sometimes see them waddling along with entire Eggo toaster waffles in their mouths. Just before acorn season, their binge time, they begin to rifle the upper oak branches as frantically as if they'd just quit smoking.

To be honest, I should lose some weight myself. That is one reason I started this walking to begin with. The same almost visible dread pursues me as it does my jogging neighbors, the grave continuously opening behind our heels. Stomp, stomp, stomp! Get away from me! And, speaking of that, do you have any idea what I pay for health insurance? It's incredible. There've been years in which the premiums went up thirty-four per cent. A while ago I saw in the business section of the *News* an article about CIGNA, the H.M.O. we belonged to, which said that the company earned $290 million, or $2.06 a share, in the fourth quarter of 2003. For shareholders, this was an encouraging increase on the $47 million, or thirty-three cents a share, earned the year before. CIGNA planned to make even more money by cutting three thousand jobs and $300 million in expenses, the article said. The real point of the article was to report that a court had approved, and CIGNA had agreed to pay, a $540-million settlement owed to doctors for "systematically" underpaying them. Of course, we want the shareholders to make money, and it's always good to cut the dead wood from the staff, but for God's sake don't do anything as foolish and fiscally unsound as paying *doctors* . . .

I hate even to think about CIGNA. Fall into a vexation-filled CIGNA reverie and you lose your concentration, go off your game, and start to mis-stomp acorns, so that instead of neatly flattening they squirt out from under your heel unstomped, or partly stomped, and bounce woundedly away. That is an awful feeling. Theologians have defined sin as "apartness from God," but I think that sin, in practical terms, is a lot like the jarring, jangling wrongness of the wrongly hit baseball or mis-stomped acorn—a kind of teeth-grinding, bone-deep discord that makes the very keelson of the universe vibrate off key.

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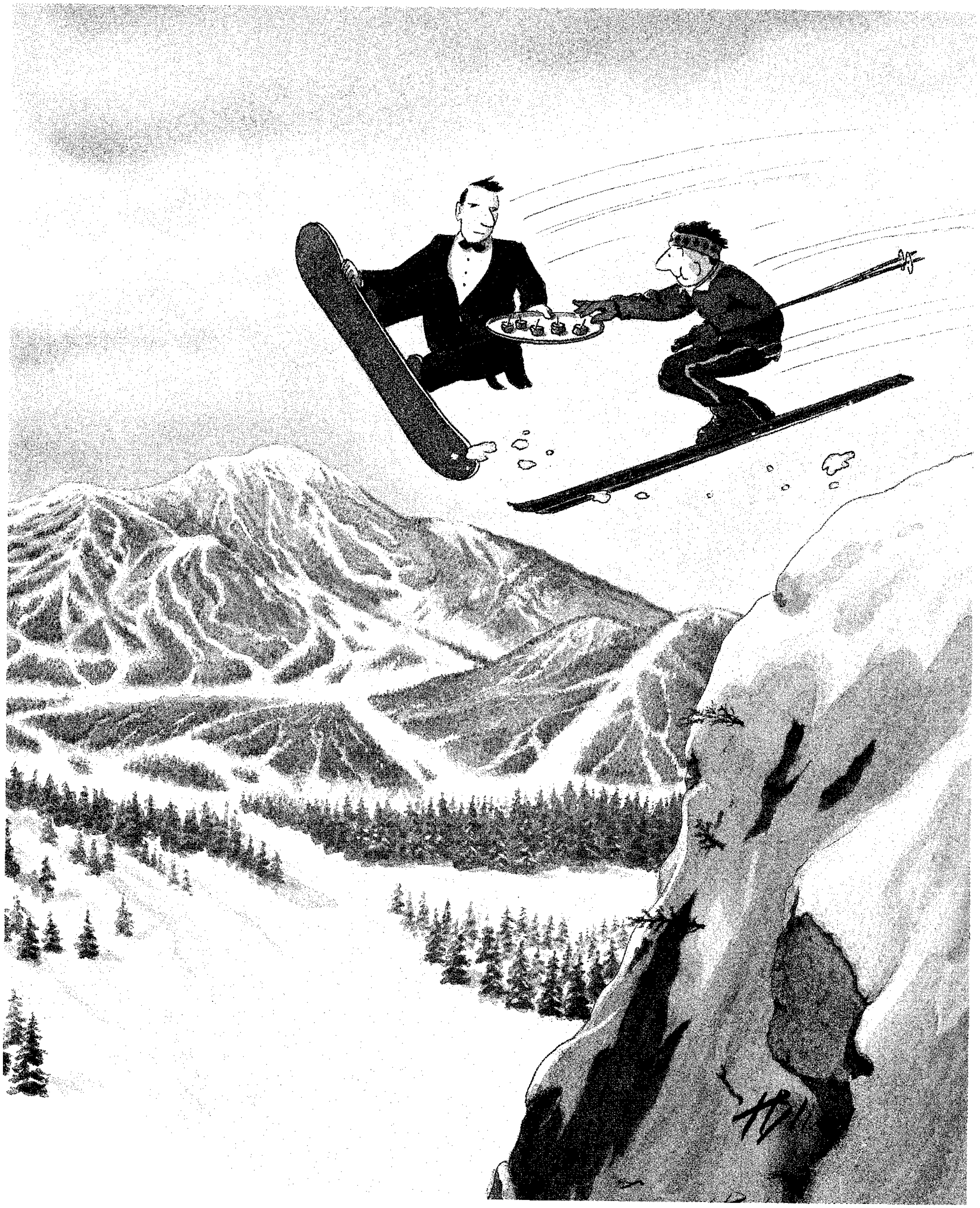

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The mis-stomped acorn, however, may explain an unexpected phenomenon of nature I learned about the other day. I was reading a book about the ice ages—I like books about America before anyone was here, even Indians; I think a good book would be called "America Before Anyone"—and the author was describing the reforestation of land after the ice caps receded, and she said that different species of trees advanced at different rates. Maples, with their wind-dispersed seeds, advanced at a rate of two hundred metres a year, while oaks, despite their heavier, non-wind-dispersed acorns, reoccupied formerly glaciated lands at a rate of three hundred and fifty metres a year. The oak forests, in other words, moved almost twice as fast as the maple forests. Clearly, some outside agents had to be at work. How else could oaks go that fast except for your wandering post-ice-age mammals nudging or pushing or perhaps even inaccurately stomping on acorns, and helping them along? The hoof comes down, the partly stepped-on acorn shoots out, and the old play-by-the-rules maple gets left behind.

Soon, our leaves and acorns will be raked and leaf-blown into heaps along the curb. Last week I was walking (not, for that moment, stomping) in my neighborhood and an old man raking leaves by the sidewalk stopped and turned to me and said, "I've been doing this all my life." Special loaders, beeping as they back up, will come and collect the heaps and pile them into trucks, and the great mass of leaves and shattered or still unshattered acorns—a huge harvest—will be dumped at a Meadowlands compost site. We live surrounded by crazy, unused bounty, as in the smell of our never-grazed lawns, after they are mown: because wild onions often grow in the grass, that mowed-lawn smell is not just delicious but gourmet.

When the President of Venezuela, Hugo Chávez, was in New York City a few weeks ago for a meeting at the United Nations, he told a *News* reporter that he had counted automobiles as he rode in from J.F.K. Airport. "Out of every 100 cars I saw on the road, 99 had only one person in the car. . . . This planet cannot sustain that mode of life," Chávez said. He also told the reporter that his favorite American writer was Noam Chomsky. Chávez's remarks interested me, so I went to hear him speak at a community center at 170th Street and Jerome Avenue, in the South Bronx. There he announced that Venezuela will sell oil at below-market price to poor neighborhoods, beginning with the South Bronx, this winter. I know that only secondhand, however; because of threats against Chávez's life from a leading American evangelist, security at the event was tight and I did not get in.

It's been unusually hard to keep my mind on my stomping this fall. That's a shame, too, because toward the end of the season there's always a final acorn bonanza, and fresh ones rustle constantly through the leaves on their way down, and bounce satisfyingly, and roll into a pattern along the sidewalk which I couldn't improve on if I placed them there myself. I'm occasionally able to stomp a dozen or fourteen in a row under alternate feet in perfect, uninterrupted sequence, like a pool shark running the table. And sometimes, to make sure my attention stays on my work, I accompany my stomping with simple, expressive chants: I recite the individual letters in "CIGNA," with an acorn stomped decisively after each letter; or, for a while, I couldn't help trying the famous sentence about Brownie, coming down extra hard on ". . . heckuva job!" (stomp).

One important key, I've found, is not to read the paper before going on a stomp; don't read, for example, the story about Senate Majority Leader Bill Frist's sale of stock in the hospital chain his family founded, a sale that brought Senator Frist an undisclosed number of dollars, and which was followed very shortly thereafter (just his luck) by a nine-per-cent drop in the stock's market value in a single day, after the release of a disappointing earnings report. This company, called H.C.A., had previously climbed back to a respectable share price after reaching a sorry low five years ago, when its officers pleaded guilty to fourteen criminal counts of Medicare fraud and paying kickbacks, and paid $1.7 billion in penalties and fines. $1.7 billion! CIGNA, tagged for a measly half a billion and change, must be a timid, effete, small-time enterprise not to do any better than that!

And, of course, all this puts me in another vexatious CIGNA fret, which becomes a tortured general-objections fret, and my stomping accuracy goes all to hell, and the glories of the New Jersey fall pass invisibly by. ♦

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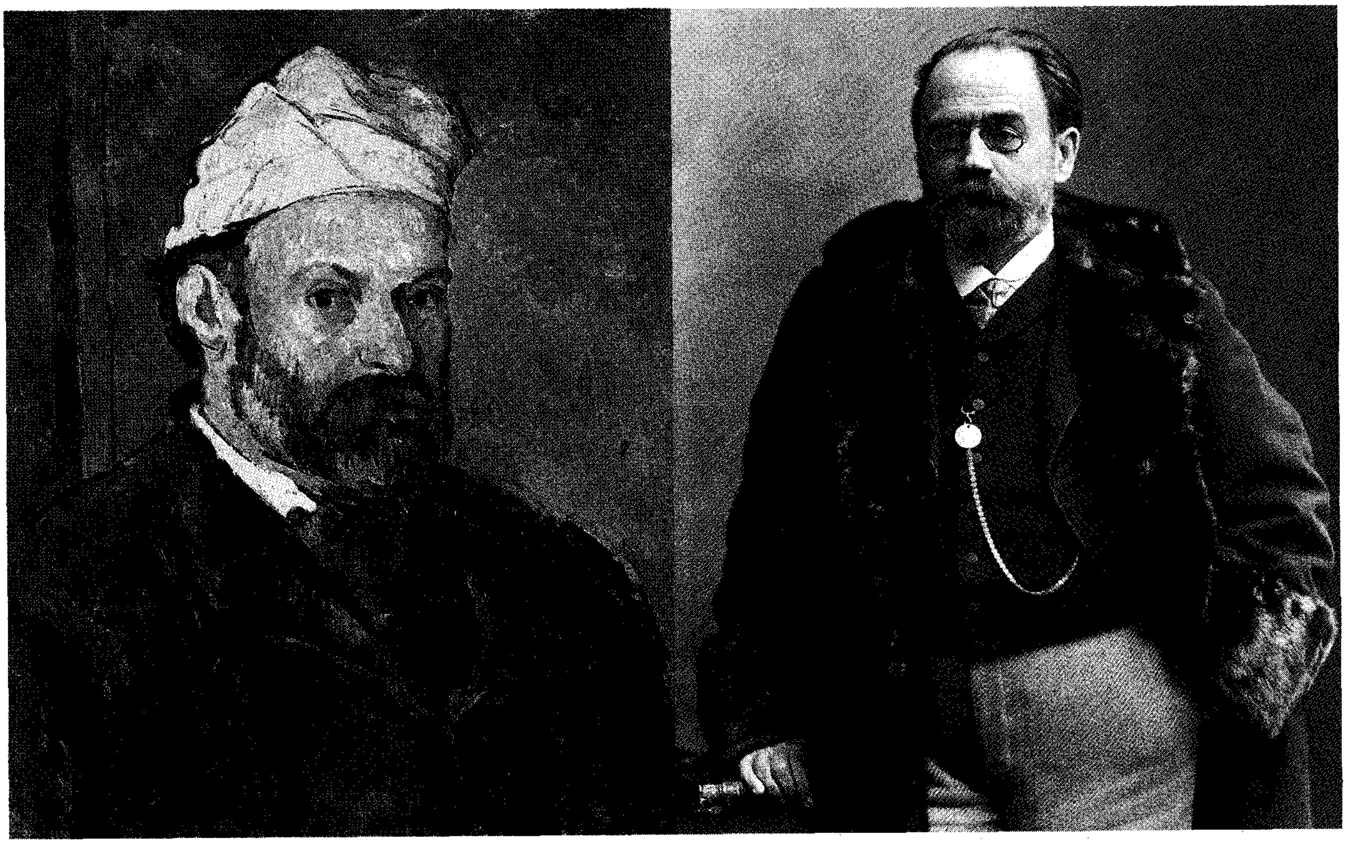
LIFE STUDIES

ARTIST'S MODEL

Zola was Cézanne's oldest friend—until he wrote a novel about him.

BY RACHEL COHEN

When Émile Zola and Paul Cézanne stopped speaking to each other, they had been friends for thirty-four years. They met in 1852, at their school in Aix-en-Provence, when they were twelve and thirteen, and they both cherished memories of their shared boyhood. Cézanne kept with him a screen that he and Zola had decorated together—the screen appeared in a number of his paintings—and Zola often evoked those beautiful days when they would set out before dawn, books in their pockets, to walk in the hills: "They had an instinctive absorption at the bosom of Nature, the unconsidered adoration of boys for trees, streams, mountains. . . . From the time they were fourteen they were solitaries, enthusiasts, ravaged by the fever of literature and of art." When, at the age of seventeen, Zola moved to Paris with his mother—Zola's father had died when the little boy was only six—the young writer and the aspiring painter kept up a passionate correspondence. Cézanne, a fine Latinist, sent long, humorous poems in complicated metres. Zola's eyes were already turned toward artistic success, and he often placed his talents second to his friend's. "Give me a great painter, or I shall never forgive you," he exhorted. And, protectively, "I don't want anyone to spoil my Cézanne for me."



"Give me a great painter, or I shall never forgive you," Zola once wrote Cézanne, but the novel depicted him as a brilliant failure.

LEFT: CÉZANNE, "SELF-PORTRAIT" (1881-82)/NEUE PINAKOTHEK/BRIDGEMAN ART LIBRARY; RIGHT: NADAR/CORBIS

Zola persuaded Cézanne to join him in Paris, and, once there, Cézanne helped Zola to understand the work of Manet, Monet, Renoir, and Pissarro, whose paintings from life and nature fought the stuffy prescriptions of the official Salon. When the Emperor Napoleon III proclaimed, in 1863, that for once the pictures rejected by the French Academy of Fine Arts would be shown to the public, Cézanne and Zola went together to the Salon of the Refused to see the bourgeoisie outraged by the naked picnicker in Manet's "Déjeuner sur l'Herbe." Zola was fired with enthusiasm—he was always a battler for the downtrodden—and wrote his first pieces of art criticism in defense of Manet and those who came to be known as the Impressionists. The essays were published under the title "My Salon," with a long dedicatory letter to Paul Cézanne: "It's for you alone that I wrote these pages, I know that you will read them with your heart and that, tomorrow, you will love me more affectionately." Cézanne seems never to have complained that his own paintings were hardly mentioned in the book; he appreciated the way Zola patiently came back to sit for him even after he had one of his rages and smashed up the canvases. They were young, and everyone they knew was poor, but Zola was working hard as a journalist and surviving, and on Thursday nights they would all crowd into Zola's apartment and eat the one decent meal of the week. Then they would argue

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about painting and nature and revolution late into the night.

Twenty years passed: the Emperor left the throne, the French lost the Franco-Prussian War and established the Third Republic, and Zola made his fortune and his reputation. His series of Rougon-Macquart novels (subtitled "the natural and social history of a family under the Second Empire") was variously reviled and acclaimed; he built a house in the country with the proceeds from "The Drinking Den," "Nana," and, in 1885, the harrowing and best-selling account of a miners' strike, "Germinal." This period in Zola's life, thoughtfully considered in Frederick Brown's impressive biography, is newly accessible now that Nouveau Monde Editions has published twelve volumes of his complete works (another nine are forthcoming), arranged in chronological order; the project is under the direction of the renowned Zola scholar Henri Mitterand and incorporates, for the first time, journalism and correspondence alongside the novels. Nouveau Monde has just issued the volume bearing most directly on the question of what happened to the camaraderie between Zola and Cézanne. For it was a novel that marked the end of the friendship, a book that Zola decided—he was in a hurry and said he could think of nothing better—to call "L'Oeuvre," or "The Work."

In the spring of 1885, flush from the success of "Germinal," Zola announced to the press that he was going to return to the world of the Impressionists for "L'Oeuvre," the fourteenth novel in the Rougon-Macquart series. Before Zola had even finished his customary intensive period of research, he was well behind the rigid schedule by which he produced a novel a year. And then the friends of Edmond de Goncourt and his late brother Jules began telling the newspapers that Zola's forthcoming "L'Oeuvre" would plagiarize "Manette Salomon," the Goncourts' novel about a painter. Zola dashed off an angry reply, but in fact his plans for the novel called for rather extensive borrowing of the experiences and the works of his friends. Never one to observe too strictly the line between life and art, Zola had already told a sales agent, "It's my whole youth, I've put myself and all my friends in it."

This news was received with some trepidation by the Impressionists, who, rudderless since the death of Manet, two years earlier, were mostly in rather precarious circumstances. Monet was living in rural poverty with his mistress and child; Pissarro sold very little. Cézanne was isolated in Aix-en-Provence, eking an existence out of the meagre allowance he got from his father, and, in the face of annual rejection from the Salon, struggling to pursue the great work of his life. "Feel and perceive Nature, organize your perceptions, express yourself profoundly and with order, that is to say classically," he later advised the young painters who gathered around him. In 1885, however, Cézanne's work had been recognized by a few friends, and by a grocer who allowed him to pay in canvases.

Although none of these artists were in a position to welcome public criticism from a famous novelist, Cézanne, far from the susurrus, may not have taken the danger too seriously. He had made an appearance in a Zola novel a dozen years earlier, when he'd had a minor part, as the painter Claude Lantier, in "The Stomach of Paris." Zola had been planning for some time to make Claude Lantier the central character of his new novel, and, even if he never mentioned his intention to Cézanne directly, Cézanne had read a biography of Zola in which the plan was discussed. They may have talked about it when the painter visited the Zolas the previous summer; perhaps Zola assumed that Cézanne would be seeing the newspaper serialization in the fall. Yet it seems to have been when Zola, punctually as always, sent the finished book to Cézanne, in April of 1886, that the painter fully realized he was the subject of a brutal exposure.

In "L'Oeuvre," Claude Lantier, born and brought up in Provence, has a ruddy face and a beard, cries easily, and is shy around women. He is never satisfied with his paintings, especially the nudes; day after day, he scrapes the figures off the canvas, and paints them again. He is given to exclaiming, in wonder and in terror, "*La vie! La vie!*" Claude Lantier's best friend is a writer named Pierre Sandoz, whose work had been treated roughly in the newspapers before he finally achieved great success. Their shared childhood is described in detail, as are their early years in Paris together: the first battles on behalf of the new art, the sessions where the

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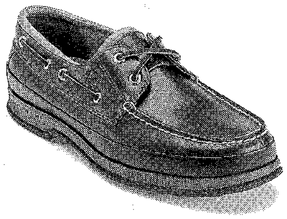

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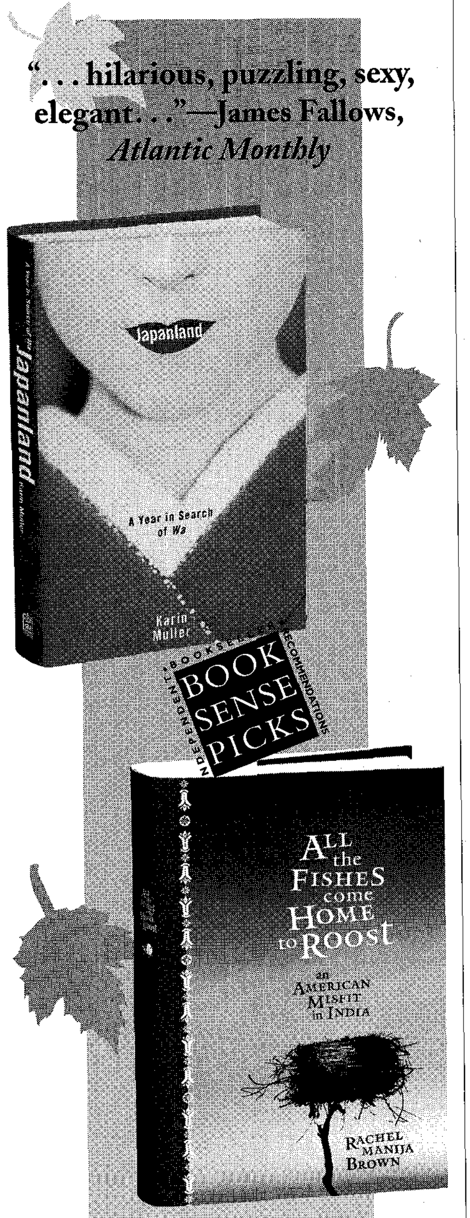
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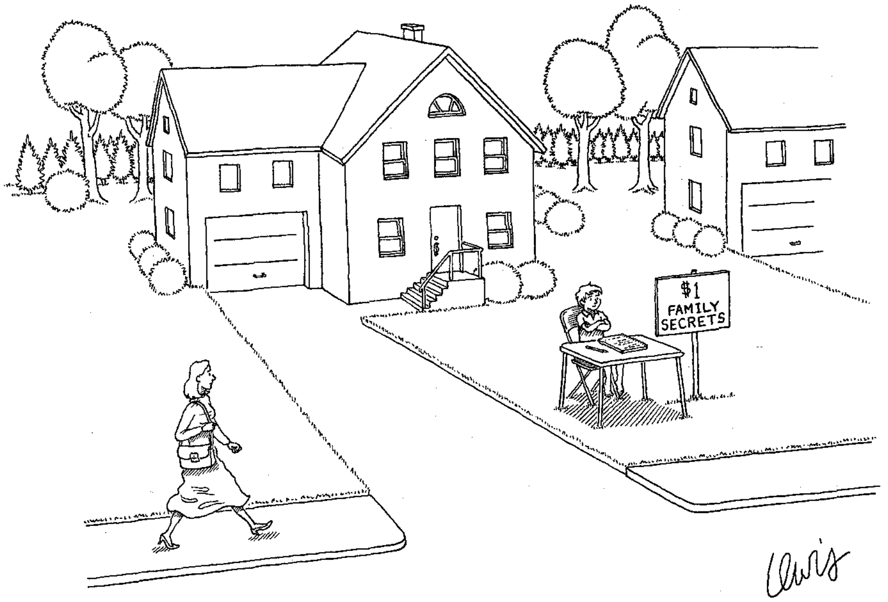


writer sits for the painter, the Thursday-night dinners, the long walks all over Paris and the countryside beyond. The painter has a model who becomes his mistress, and the couple have an unexpected son. The writer marries his own mistress; they do not have children.

All these elements were true to life. But, unlike Cézanne, Claude grows so neglectful that he sees his mistress only when he paints her, and taunts her for not being as beautiful as his portraits of her. ("Near the armpits now, can you see the way the flesh is beginning to sag? Not very beautiful, is it? Now look at her body, there's no sagging there, is there?") Meanwhile, their little son, Jacques, never cared for, dies, at the age of twelve. The writer, the child's godfather, is the one person in the book who seems to notice the child's illness. After the boy's death, Claude weeps, but then feels compelled to paint Jacques's lifeless body as it lies on the mattress. ("Work dried his eyes and steadied his hand, and his son's icy body turned into a model, a strange, enthralling subject.")

Afflictions rain down: the ridicule of friends, a meaningless affair, humiliating rejections, a lesion of the eye. In the last third of the story, the writer returns again and again to his dashed hopes that the painter "would leave all the other talents far, far behind." Instead, the painter has shown "the inability to be the genius of the idea he proclaimed," and the writer condemns him to "the torment of the precursor who sows the idea without reaping the glory." At the book's end, the painter hangs himself in front of the incomplete work that was to have been his masterpiece. The writer burns the painting. At the funeral, sorrowing, he watches the dirt fall on his friend's coffin. Then he says to the only other remaining mourner, an older painter, "Let us go and work."

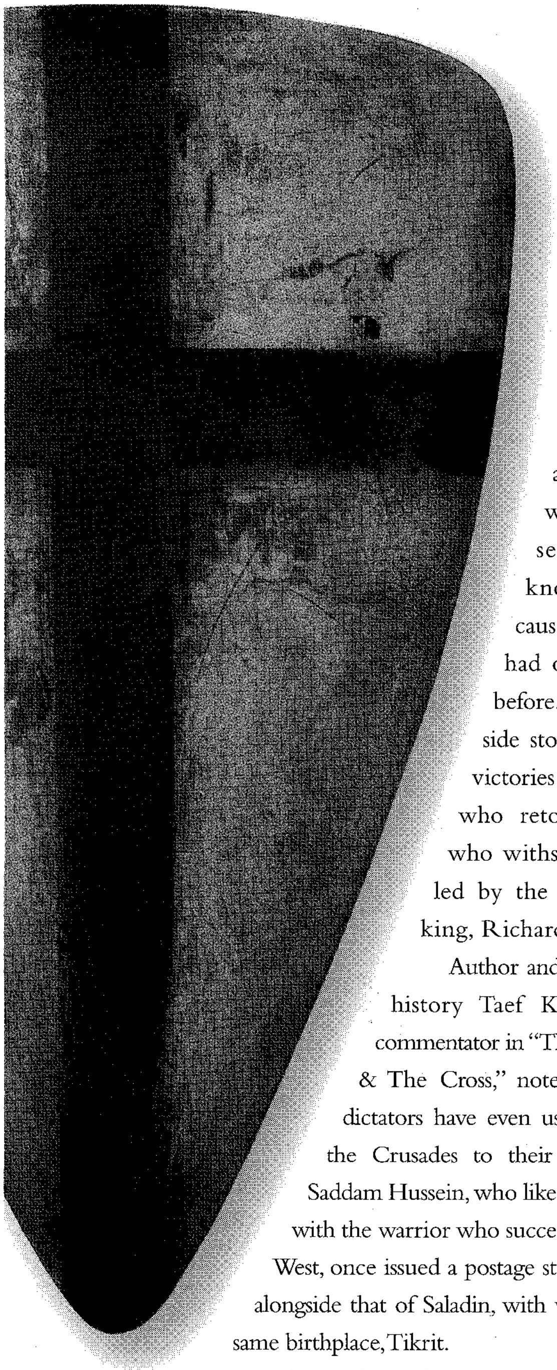
It is not a small matter in a friendship to open one of the most talked-about novels of the year to find a character very like oneself portrayed as an unfaithful lover, a fatally neglectful father, an object of scorn, a suicide, and a failure in the artistic project that one has pursued with single-minded devotion for thirty years. Cézanne's highly respected biographer John Rewald felt that the painter was "cruelly wounded" by Zola's book; others insist that the two had already begun to part ways. If we are to believe the notoriously unreliable pilgrims who visited Cézanne in his later years, the painter seems to have had a range of contradictory responses to Zola's novel. Cézanne said that in "L'Oeuvre" Zola had expressed "all his most intimate thought." He was reported to have been touched by the early chapters' tender account of their country walks, and to have laughed, "He really had me... when he bellows: 'Ah, life! life!'" Later, when Zola took his heroic and much vilified stance accusing the French government of anti-Semitism and criminal misconduct in convicting Captain Alfred Dreyfus of treason, peo-

WAR OF TWO CULTURES

The Crusades: Crescent & The Cross

Pundits and politicians have looked to the medieval era's two-hundred-year holy wars in the Middle East, the Crusades, as a way to understand current geopolitical events. They have pointed out parallels between then and now: Christians were at war with Muslims. There was the advocacy of sacred violence, and political connivance was inextricably linked to all discussion.

Historian and author Jonathan Phillips, a commentator on The History Channel documentary débuting November 6th at 9 P.M. ET/PT, "The Crusades: Crescent & The Cross," notes that the word "crusade" is for the most part used in the secular sense today. "If you were to open up any newspaper, you would probably find 'crusade' in it. For example, there might be something about a 'crusade' to stop waiting lists in hospitals—Tony Blair came out with that the other day. But Blair didn't mean a holy war. He meant a good



cause." But in the East, the Crusades are still spoken of, with the kind of seemingly intimate knowledge that could cause one to assume they had occurred only days before. Café and street-side storytellers lionize the victories of Saladin, the man who retook Jerusalem and who withstood the challenge led by the celebrated English king, Richard the Lionheart.

Author and professor of Islamic history Taef Kamal el-Azhari, a commentator in "The Crusades: Crescent & The Cross," notes that politicos and dictators have even used the images from the Crusades to their own ends. Indeed, Saddam Hussein, who liked to compare himself with the warrior who successfully challenged the West, once issued a postage stamp with his picture alongside that of Saladin, with whom he shared the same birthplace, Tikrit.

Present-day residents of these fought-over territories spend their days at former battle sites. "Although much of it was destroyed by an earthquake in 1302, many of the citadels and the fortifications are there, to remind you of that era, " says el-Azhari. Notes Phillips, "If you were to go to the site for the battle of Hattin—where Saladin defeats the Crusaders—and if you have a good range of contemporary descriptions, you can piece it together." The contested holy places—a pretext for the wars—are also still extant: the Al Aqsa Mosque, the Dome of the Rock, and the Church of the Holy Sepulcher. Phillips says that the Old City of Jerusalem has physically changed very little. And these sacred sites still hold great power. El-Azhari notes, "The Al Aqsa Mosque is the first place the Muslims prayed in the direction of. In Saudi Arabia, the mosque is on the fifty riyal, the currency that is used every day."

A Place in Heaven

The war cycle was set in motion in early 1095 when Pope Urban II got a request from Byzantine Emperor Alexius Comnenus to help him defend his Constantinople-based Eastern Christian empire from the invading Muslim warriors. Urban took the opportunity of the Council of Clermont to speak of the atrocities done in the name of Islam against Christian pilgrims. Among other things, Urban claimed that the pilgrims to the Church of the Holy Sepulcher were raped, forced to convert, or disemboweled. Modern-day historians conclude that the pope was either exaggerating or had been misled by the Byzantines. At the end of his speech, legend has it, the crowd roared its approval: "*Deus vult!*" (God wills it!)

What happened next is open to speculation, as no one knows whether Urban foresaw how popular the Crusade would become. Because this war was divinely sanctioned, he granted indulgences. Those who had slaughtered other Europeans in the unending battles were, at best, headed for Purgatory. But most were doomed to Hell. Any soldier, however, who took up the sword to fight the infidel, could be guaranteed a place in Heaven.

Knights, soldiers, and pilgrims by the thousands took the vow. They swore to march to the Holy Land—some with their wives, and others with entourages—through the European

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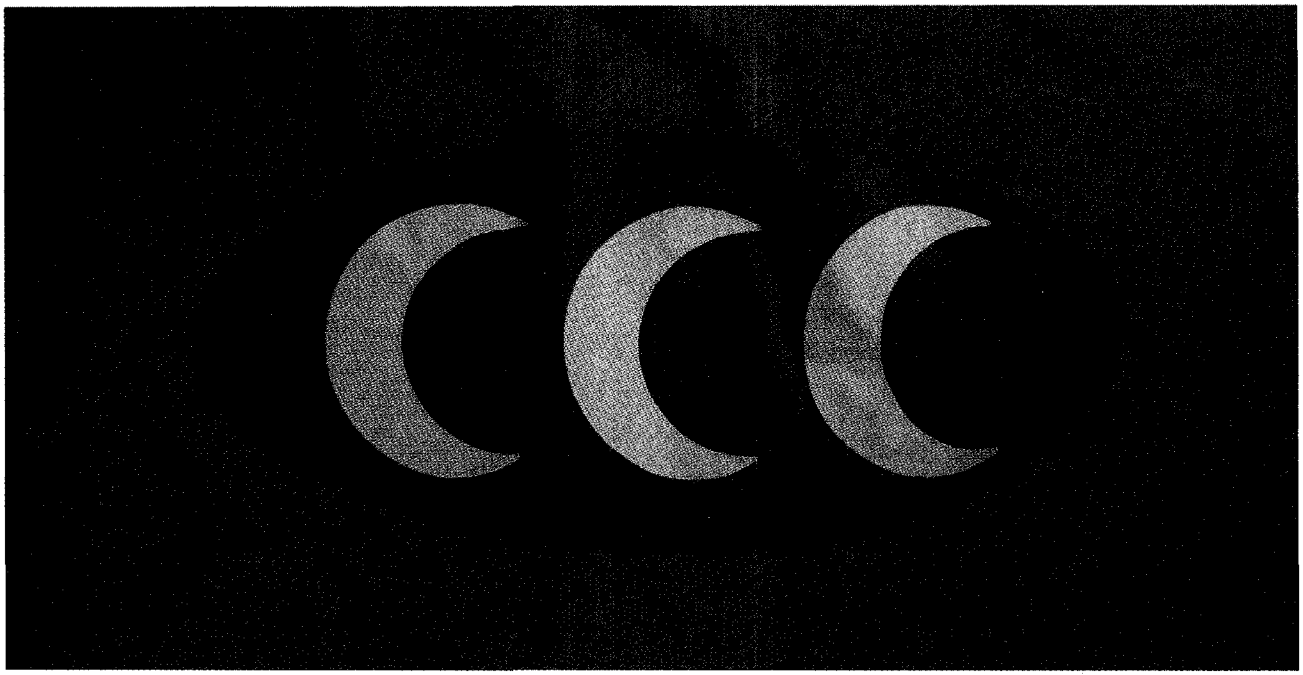


continent, over mountains, and across barren deserts to reclaim Jerusalem. Certain of their places in the afterlife, the Crusaders launched what might today be called "shock and awe" attacks throughout the enemy territory. They slaughtered Muslims, but also Jews, heretics, and fellow Christians.

Alexius hoped for a small group of mercenaries; what he got was a force of more than sixty thousand soldiers with the goal of wresting control of Jerusalem from the Muslims, who had ruled it for more than four hundred years. In the medieval cosmology, Jerusalem was at the center of the earth, and for Christians, there was no more sacred a site than the Church of the Holy Sepulcher. Erected in 330, this church is built on the reputed location of Christ's crucifixion; it is also where Jesus was entombed.

In 1099, the Crusaders took Jerusalem. They established four main states: the counties of Edessa and Tripoli; the principality of Antioch; and the kingdom of Jerusalem. The Second Crusade was launched in 1147 to retake the city of Edessa, which had been lost in battle (by convention the major Crusades in the Holy Land are numbered, for a total of either seven or eight, depending on how one sets the parameters). The Third Crusade was prompted by the loss of Jerusalem to Saladin, the man who revived the jihad—the struggle to defend one's faith.

As the years wore on, Western enthusiasm for battle persisted and they staged ever-greater campaigns to try to achieve victory. European kings pledged their fortunes as the Crusaders sought to regain Jerusalem. "They tried to reclaim Christ's land for Christianity—that's why they kept on going," Phillips says. "And, for Muslims, Jerusalem was an important city. Once they had it, they had to keep it."

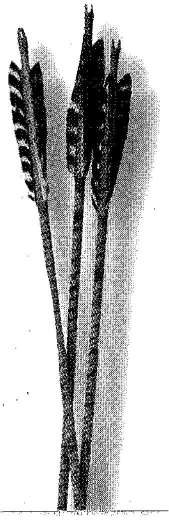
SACRED VS. SECULAR?

But "it wasn't always about war," says el-Azhari. "The East influenced the West. Intermarriage took place all of the time." A chaotic balance occurred. "There's a wonderful quote from a Spanish traveler who was performing a pilgrimage to Mecca. He noticed three trading caravans passing chained, captive Crusaders as they headed to Damascus." According to el-Azhari, the traveler said, "People of commerce are taking care of their daily lives. People of war are taking care of *their* daily lives. Life goes on." Phillips explains, "Both sides were like two heavyweight boxers who keep hitting at each other, unable to knock the other one out."

What drove both sides—the sacred or the secular? Phillips argues that it was both, because for the most part there was so little money to be made from these far-flung ventures. But for el-Azhari, "religion was for the poor and the illiterate. The soldiers were either professionals or mercenaries. For commerce especially, the wars were convenient, because the Near East and the Middle East controlled the commercial artery from the Far East to Europe."

Perhaps, however, the question is simply too facile to ask. Just as it is today, the area is of both strategic and mercantile importance. Answering why there is bloodshed today doesn't come easily, either. Suffice to say, each fighter has his motives.

The Crusades in the Middle East ended in 1291 with the fall of Acre, the last Christian settlement. But they continued elsewhere, such as Cyprus and Asia Minor, for generations. The idea of the Crusade and jihad was firmly established, leaving us with a dark legacy: the word "crusade" for the East holds the same power as does "jihad" for the West. ■



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ple were surprised that Cézanne—who was by then devout, loyal to the Church, conservative, and anti-Dreyfus—refused to join those censuring Zola. On the other hand, around this time, when Cézanne was in Paris, and friends tried to take him by the arm to go and see Zola, "he gave such screams of fright that they were obliged to let him go."

Among all these reports there is but one, ambiguous, piece of documentary evidence: immediately after receiving his copy of "L'Oeuvre," Cézanne wrote Zola a polite note in which he thanked "the author of the Rougon-Macquart for this good testimony of remembering" and asked "permission to allow me to shake his hand, in memory of years gone by." Then there was an incontestable absence. After this note, Zola and Cézanne neither wrote nor spoke to each other again. When Zola sought news of Cézanne, he wrote to their mutual friends to inquire.

"L'Oeuvre" strained many old friendships. Monet wrote to Zola as soon as he had finished the book, "You know the fanatical admiration I have for your talent. No; but I have struggled long enough, and I'm afraid that at the moment of our arrival our enemies will make use of your book to cudgel us senseless." Pissarro thought the main problem with "L'Oeuvre" was that it was "not a very well-made novel for the author of 'The Drinking Den' or 'Germinal,' " but he still joined Monet and Mallarmé in hosting a banquet held to protest the book. Edmond de Goncourt was apoplectic when the published novel compounded his initial suspicions: even the rare disorder of the eye that he and his brother had invented for their painter in "Manette Salomon" had mysteriously recurred in the eyes of Claude Lantier.

Goncourt cried plagiarism so regularly that his accusations are often rightly overlooked, but in this case many writers would have had grounds for complaint. Flaubert's scene of an artist painting a dead child, in "Sentimental Education," had appeared seventeen years earlier. At the end of Balzac's "Unknown Masterpiece," the painter Frenhofer, whose understanding of form had become so incomprehensible to his acquaintances that he is driven to madness, burns his paintings and is found dead the next morning. Cézanne, who had long identified with Frenhofer, was not the only one to recognize Zola's appropriation. "Fundamentally, Zola does nothing but resole the shoes of literature," Goncourt concluded in his journal, "and now that he's reprinted Manette Salomon he's going to redo Balzac's Country People."

Perhaps as a result of having been borrowed from so many sources, there is a curious mingling and doubling about many of the characters in "L'Oeuvre"; the book sometimes has the quality of a bad dream in which people who have died come back mixed in with one another. The older painter, the one to whom the writer expresses the shared ethic of Zola and Cézanne, "Let us go and work," is generally understood to be a sort of hybrid of Zola's two masters, Flaubert and Manet. Zola, in his notebooks, indicated another unlikely combination in his plans for his main character: "a Manet, a dramatized Cézanne; closer to Cézanne." The central painting of the novel, Claude's one great accomplishment, called "Plein Air," shows, with bold dark strokes, a naked woman stretched out on the grass beside a man in a black coat. It's a painting that resembles various works by Cézanne, but it is also obviously akin to Manet's "Déjeuner sur l'Herbe," and, like the Manet, "Plein Air" causes an invigorating scandal at the Salon of the Refused. The fact that the central character is allowed one moment of greatness, the moment in which he paints like Manet, does not seem to have been of much comfort to Cézanne, who remained the model most often referred to in Zola's notes: "Not to forget the despair of Paul who always thought he was finding painting." The claustrophobia of being a character trapped in a novel by someone else stems not just from the distortion of having your past rewritten but from the eeriness of reading what might be your obituary.

The summer before "L'Oeuvre," in 1885, when Cézanne made his usual visit to the Zolas' luxurious country mansion in Médan, all had seemed much as it always had. In the front hall, his paintings hung with Manet's and Monet's; the two friends took walks in the country; Cézanne borrowed Zola's canoe, Nana, to paint along the river. Still, Zola had put him off several times before finally sending word that there was room

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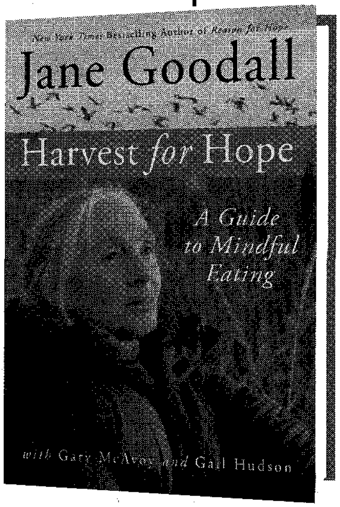
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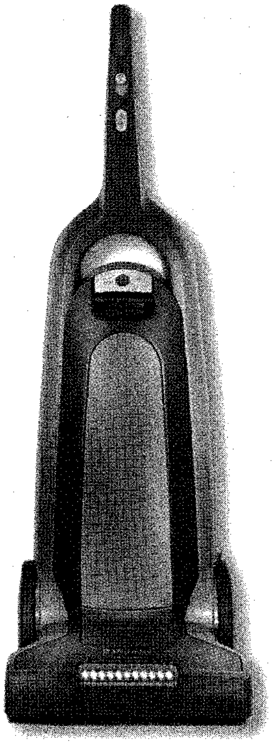

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in the house. On other occasions, Cézanne had stayed for a month or more; this time he left rather quickly. It was not his way to complain if Zola was occupied with richer and better-connected friends. Of this visit, Cézanne said only, somewhat obscurely, that he hadn't liked the look Zola and his maid exchanged over his battered hat.

Cézanne always visited alone—his mistress of many years, Hortense Fiquet, and his beloved son were not welcome at the Zolas' mansion, at least not since Zola had married his own mistress, Alexandrine, and become respectable. All the same, Zola was thoroughly informed about the details of his friend's complicated family life, and, in particular, of the machinations of Cézanne's controlling father. The elder Cézanne, though he had not married his own mistress until five years after Paul's birth, had been livid when he heard rumors of his son's entanglement. Cézanne felt that if he married Hortense Fiquet he would run a serious risk of being cut off. Even when his father knew of the existence of his grandson, Cézanne continued to live at the family home in Aix, and went in secret to visit Fiquet and their son, Paul, Jr. There was a year when Cézanne was constantly asking Zola to help his secret family: "Here is my monthly solicitation." Most of Zola's letters to Cézanne have not survived, but we know that he sent money each time he was asked. Cézanne wrote, gratefully, "If I have managed to survive this situation it's thanks to the good and solid plank that you extended to me." And, he later joked, "I'm a nonentity and unable to do you any service, but since I'll be going before you, I shall put in a word with the All Highest on your behalf for a good place."

In 1883, Cézanne sent a copy of his will to Zola for safekeeping; in it he designated as equal beneficiaries his adored mother and the son he wanted to be sure was protected. Hortense Fiquet was, notably, not included; Cézanne doesn't seem to have been very close to her, especially in their later years together, yet he painted her, beautifully, over and over. Zola and his friends referred to her in correspondence as La Boule—one of the metal balls in the French game whose purpose is to knock other balls out of position—but Zola was probably in favor of marriage. At least the Zola character Sandoz makes several speeches urging marriage on the painter, who eventually does marry his mistress in the novel.

Things were going a little more easily for Cézanne in the eighteen-eighties; his letters sounded more cheerful. And, in that summer of 1885, an unusual thing had happened. Cézanne seems to have fallen in love with a woman about whom almost nothing is known except that he met her in Aix and they kissed. Cézanne asked Zola to forward letters between him and his paramour. Zola then included a similar last-ditch affair in his novel, which may have had an effect on Cézanne's real-life household. Cézanne's sister Marie, a religious Catholic, had been trying to convince both her father and her brother that marriage was the only way to address the sin in which Cézanne and his mistress were living. Perhaps her reasoning took hold, or perhaps Cézanne was worried that Zola's novel would expose him to Fiquet, or to his father, in a way that might separate him from his boy or jeopardize his ability to support him. Whether the novel was prediction or cause, it accurately foretold the future. In April of 1886, after Cézanne had been with Hortense Fiquet for seventeen years, and when their son was fourteen years old, he married her. The wedding date, April 28th, was a little more than three weeks after Cézanne had read Zola's fictional portrait of his relationship, fatherhood, and eventual marriage, and had written his final letter to Zola.

There was something a little uncanny about the way Zola often described circumstances that later came to be, both in his friends' lives and in his own. Henry James, after seeing Zola in England, said he gave the impression that it was "as if les Rougon-Macquart had written *him*." James had first encountered Zola as part of a group of novelists referred to as "*les cinq*," and whose other members were Flaubert, Goncourt, Daudet, and Turgenev. They visited and dined and read aloud and supported one another's daring efforts to make a new kind of novel. In 1879, Zola wrote one of the most serious encomiums of his life for Flaubert's "Sentimental Education," another example of his prescience, which prompted a delighted letter from Flaubert. The death of this friend and father figure, the following year, was catastrophic. When, a few months later, the

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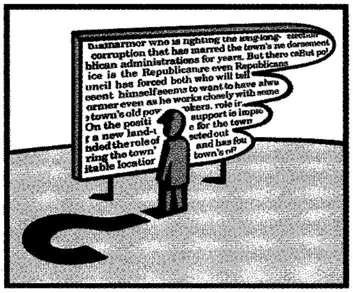

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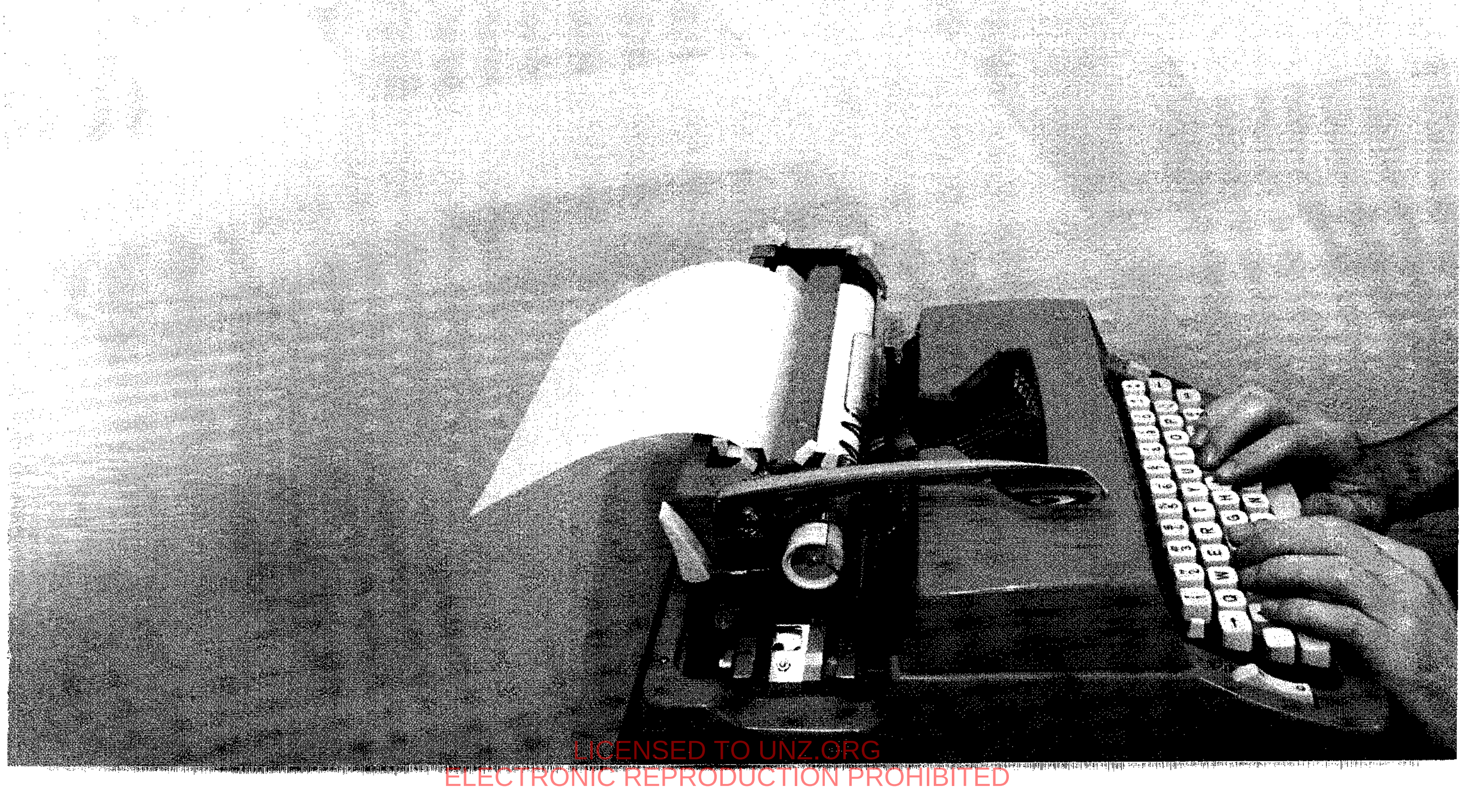

"Women's letters rarely just exchange information. **They tell stories.**"

—From the Introduction

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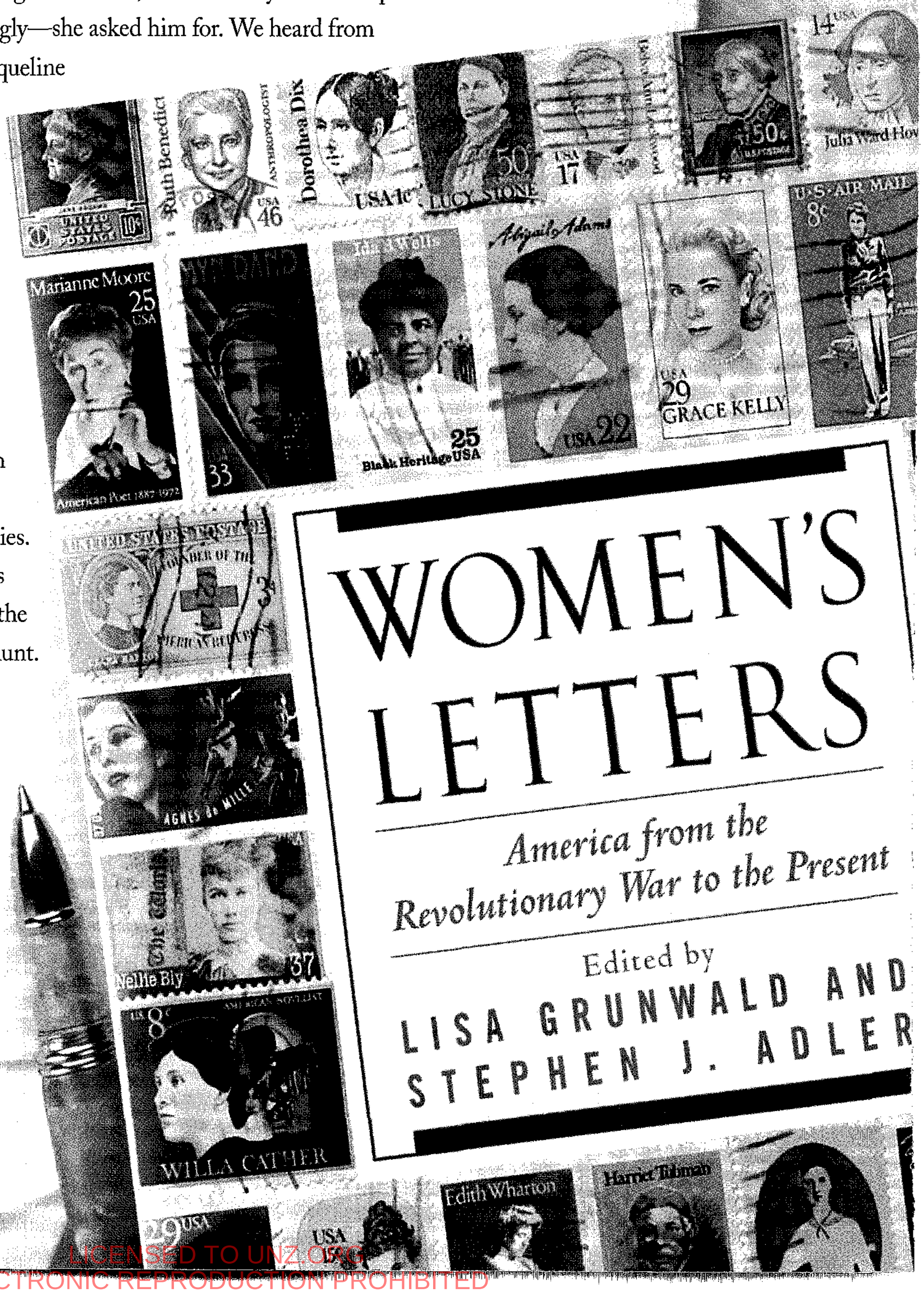
Sincerely,

Lisa Grunwald

Stephen J. Adler

Lisa Grunwald & Stephen J. Adler,
Editors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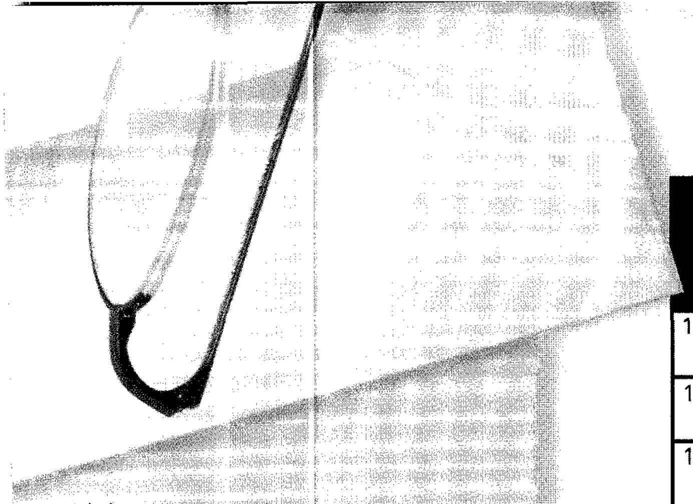

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Yours, Sincerely

A Correspondence Crossword

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Across

1. Possible nickname of novelist F. Scott, who wrote wife Zelda that her “rotten letters” were his “Z” file
5. In 1919, Agnes ____ Kurowsky, the Red Cross nurse Ernest Hemingway fell in love with, composes a “Dear John” letter
8. ____ Bros. (Groucho Marx wrote to them about “A Night in Casablanca”)
10. One of Zsa Zsa’s sisters
11. The ____ Guild, Producer (recipient of playwright George Bernard Shaw’s 1923 note)
12. Crash
13. Ventilates
14. Letter writer’s surface
16. Greek alphabet’s 23rd letter
17. Revered patriot whose wife Rachel wrote to him in 1775
19. Wires
23. Unknown advice seeker’s sign-off, for short
24. Type of lamp
26. Postage
29. Cookie
30. Make a spelling mistake, for example
31. Susan B. ____ (in 1902, she mentions in a letter to Elizabeth Cady Stanton that it has been 51 years since they first met)
34. Purpose
35. ____ May Alcott, of *Little Women* fame
36. Angeles’ address accompaniment
37. Hautbois

Down

1. Letter-under-the-pillow’s addressee, Tooth ____ (variant)
2. Namesakes of Gershwin with pen
3. Explosive letters
4. Zippo, for short
5. Letter’s action word
6. Presidential desk locale, ____ Office
7. ____ and address (information on the envelope)
8. Card game
9. Elvis Presley hit: “____ to Sender”
11. Dance style
15. In the manner of
17. Corresponding chum
18. “I wrote a while ____...” (reply seeker’s opening line)
20. Flight from the law
21. Dour
22. Tuscan city
25. Myrna of movies
26. Sigil
27. Duo plus one
28. Hemingway novel, *A Farewell to* ____
29. Toledo’s state on the envelope
32. Opposite of “Yess!”
33. Cause supporter, ____-thumper

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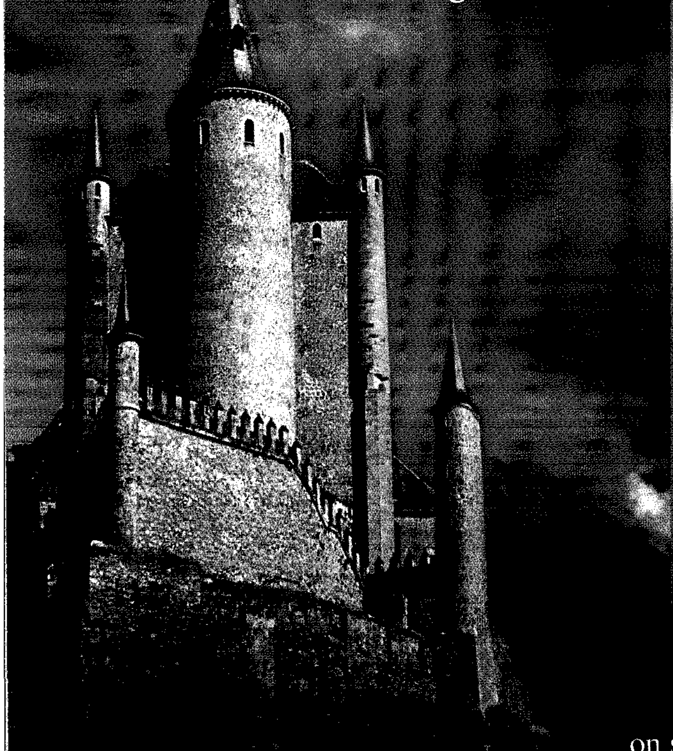

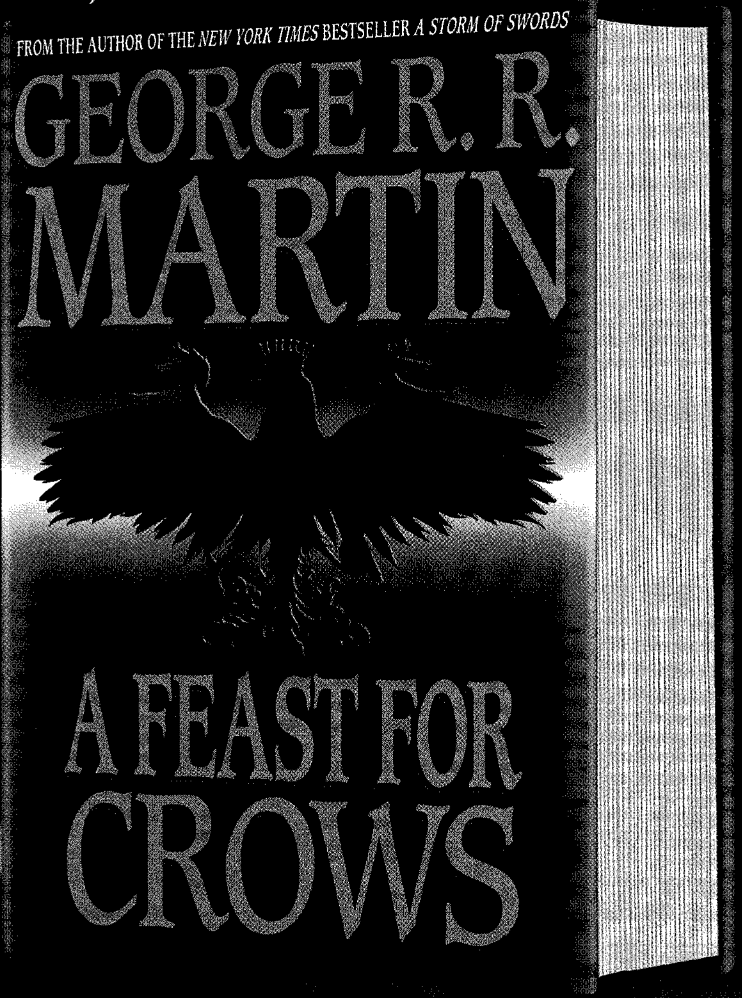
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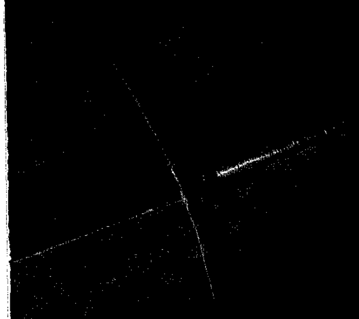

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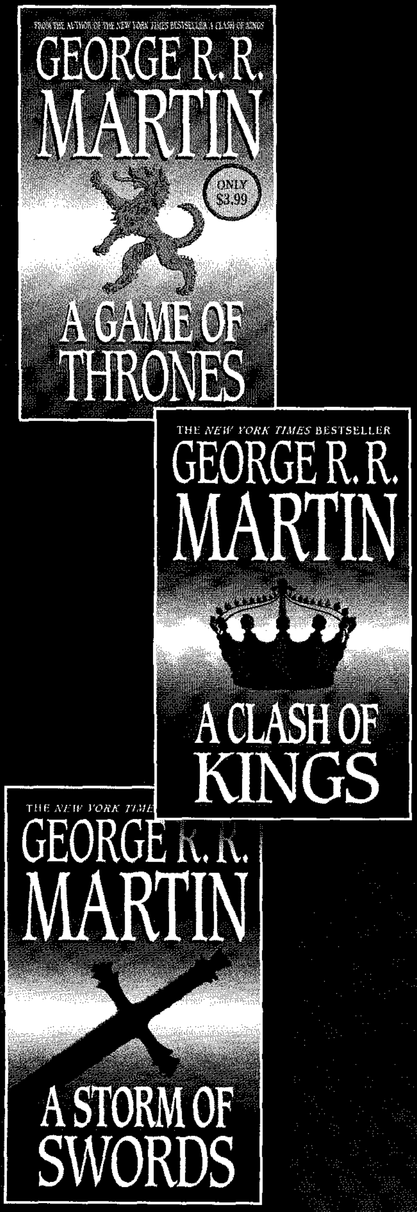
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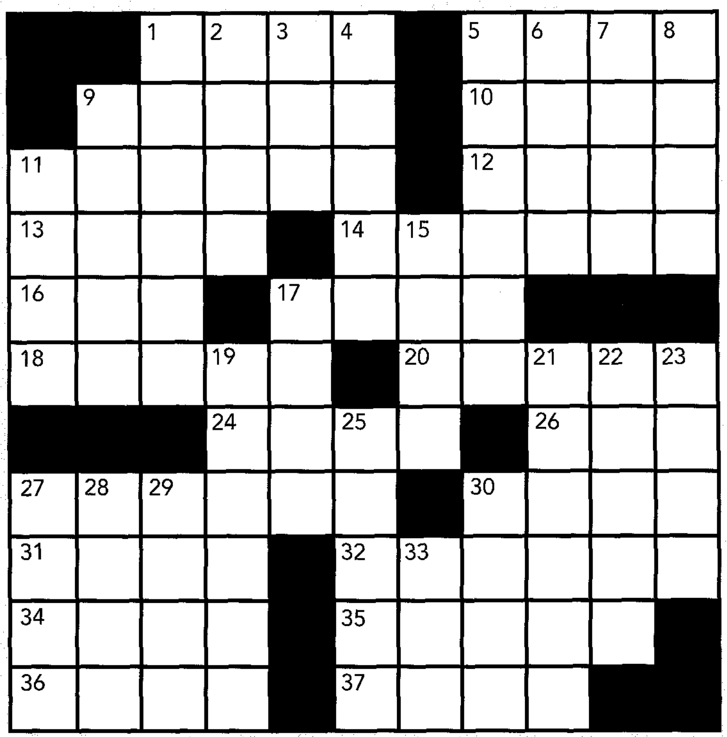
Adventuring

A Crossed-Swords Crossword Challenge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Across

1. Unsheathed a sword
5. Dainty
9. Body's bed below
10. Hallowed
11. Made the donkey's hee-haw
12. Thorned flower
13. Pauper's duds before the riches
14. Prison guard (British variant)
16. Natural-style prefix
17. Common nonflowerer
18. Thick forest's description
20. Fermented honey and water beverages
24. Really small, ____-bitsy
26. Juiceless
27. The Queen Regent in *A Feast for Crows*
30. Horse coat color
31. Carouse
32. *A Song of Ice and Fire* author, ____R. R. Martin
34. Heraldic wreath on a knight's helmet
35. Shackles
36. Nobleman
37. Permits

Down

1. Fearsome fire-breathing flier
2. Golden sunburst beams
3. Dusk
4. In a family, royal or otherwise, something that causes division
5. Monarch's seat
6. Sheep-hair fabric
7. Additional
8. Glaring glancer
9. Your ____(used when addressing 27-Across)
11. Born and ____
15. Military force
17. Celebration
19. 27-Across to her twin, Ser Jaime Lannister
21. Gilds
22. Carts
23. Since: olde style
25. Seal
27. Barley, for instance
28. Emerald country
29. Character's function
30. Origin
33. Before

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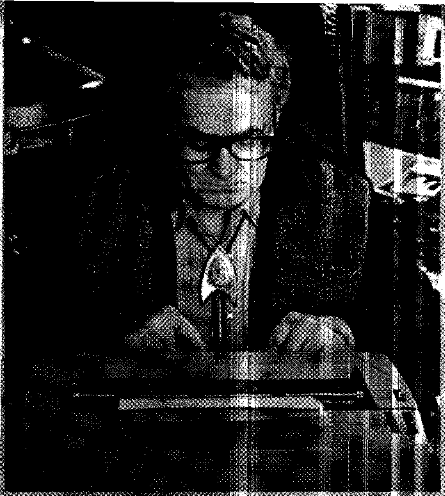

"I think of myself in that oral tradition—
as a troubadour, a village taleteller,
the guy in the shadows of the campfire.
That's the way I'd like to be remembered—
as a storyteller. A good storyteller."
—Louis L'Amour

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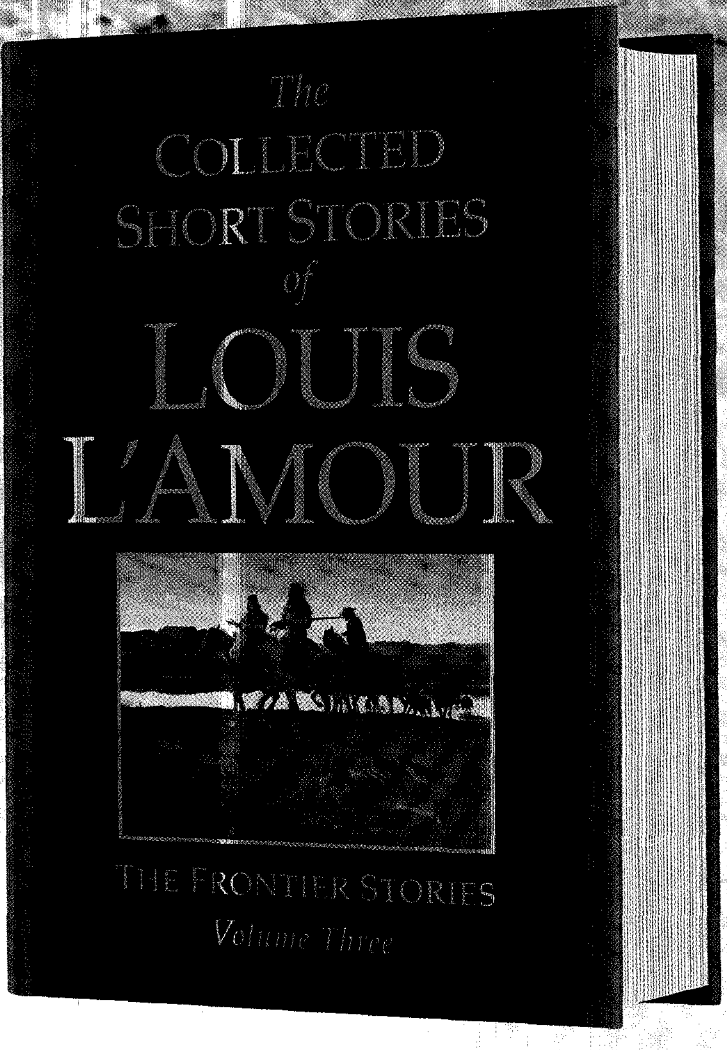

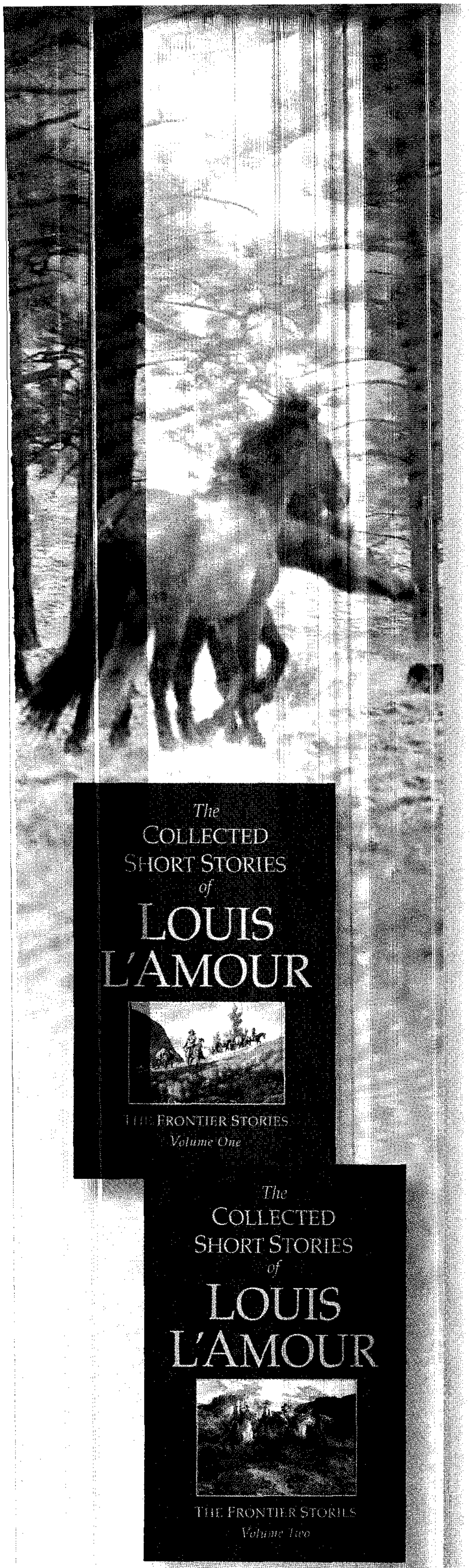
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Gather 'Round

A Frontier Crossword Challenge

■	■	1	2	3	4	■	■	5	6	7
8	9					■	10			
11						■	12			
13			■	14		15				
16			17	■	18			■	■	■
19				20	■	21		22	23	24
■	■	■	25		26	■	27			
28	29	30				31	■	32		
33				■	34		35			
36				■	37					
38			■	■	39				■	■

Across

1. Alternate for the American frontier—the Old ____
5. Cowboy's crown
8. Run-down boardinghouse in a frontier town
10. Saloon water
11. Robbed at gunpoint
12. Farmer's yield
13. Solid tree
14. *Volume One* story, "The ____ of Sentinel"
16. Long journey
18. *Volume Three* story, "Valley of the ____"
19. Wandering calf
21. What guns are made of
25. Acorn from 13-Across, for one
27. How the lone cowboy rides
28. Herd hide
32. Shooting from the ____
33. Expanse
34. *Volume One* story, "The One for the ____ Kid;" also a desert
36. Weakens
37. Set the score straight
38. Vertical distance above sea level, for short
39. "Darn!"

Down

1. Gunslinger's shooters, ____ Colts
2. *Volume One* story, "Dead-____ Drift"
3. Breeding stallion
4. Writes via clickety-clacks
5. Cornu
6. Bustles
7. Record
8. Sounds heard in frontier showdowns
9. Courage
10. Vistas
15. Fee-fi-fo-____
17. Trail herd destination in "Riding for the Brand;" also home of Dorothy Gale
20. Little laugh, around the campfire, say
22. *Volume Three* story, "____ Me High"
23. WANTED: Dead or ____
24. Kept an easy riding gait
26. Two-____ (betrayed)
28. *Volume Two* story, "The Road to ____ Piedras"
29. ____ tradition (method of passing down stories)
30. Cried
31. Shining upon the frontier, this brighter star
35. Egg-layer

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mother from whom Zola had almost never been separated also died, the writer entered one of the most agonizing periods of his life.

He began to suffer from a series of mysterious ailments: he had heart spasms, bladder problems, "nervous pains." He became increasingly compulsive about numbers: he could not get into a cab if its license number added up to something unlucky; his mother had died on the seventeenth of October, so seventeen became a nefarious number. He could not go to bed without touching certain objects and verifying that the bedroom door was bolted; lying in bed, he would have to open his eyes seven times to make sure that he wasn't going to die. He had appalling claustrophobic dreams of being stifled, smothered, trapped, asphyxiated. This was the intensification of a perennial fear—the nightmare of being buried alive appears in no fewer than five of Zola's novels. These darker impulses and imaginings were a central part of Zola's creative work. Many of his greatest scenes are of nighttime crimes, huge crowds on violent rampages, overcast drives to cemeteries, and men struggling against an instinct for murder or incest. In his journalism, he was in perpetual combat with censorship, the Empire, the oppression of labor, and the hatred of Jews, and the sprawling battle of modern life pours out of his novels. In the Rougon-Macquart series, Zola intended to show how a family could hand down the seeds of illness and murder. For him, a novel could be an act of heroism or a crime, and sometimes both.

In the eighteen-eighties, Zola's fiction became preoccupied with the then popular theory of degeneracy, and the children in his books began to be orphaned and to die. In "La Joie de Vivre," written in 1883, a character very like Alexandrine Zola becomes a kind of adoptive mother, in an especially cruel situation, to a child whom the man she loves has had with another woman. In life, Alexandrine could not have children. Before she met Zola, when she was nineteen, and a working girl on her own, Alexandrine had given birth to a baby girl and had left the four-day-old infant at a foundling hospital. She never revealed this excruciating secret—an illegitimate child would have tarnished the Zolas' hard-won bourgeois respectability—and it was a hundred and twenty years before it became known. But, when her consequent infertility was confirmed, she went looking for the child, and discovered that the baby had died at the age of two weeks, on the day of her own twentieth birthday.

In this household of mournful anniversaries, the desire for fatherhood was ever stronger in Zola. His own father had become a father late, at the age of forty-four. As it happened, Zola was nearing the end of his forty-fourth year when he sat down to plan "L'Oeuvre," for which his initial list of possible titles begins:

> Make a child. Make a world. Make life. Creation. To create. To procreate. To impregnate nature. The struggle with the angel. Defeat. To be God. The making of a child. Giving birth. Parturition. Conception. To make a child.

Two years after the publication of a novel that narrowly escaped being called "Parturition," and three years after Cézanne had started and ended his brief affair, Zola took as his mistress his wife's maid, the young and beautiful Jeanne Rozerot. He was forty-eight; she was twenty-one. In 1889, she gave birth to their daughter, Denise, and in 1891 to their son, whom they named Jacques.

The news of Zola's second household made the rounds—Edmond de Goncourt crowed in his journal that a friend "confirms for me in all certitude that Zola has got a petit ménage." Alexandrine Zola was the last to hear. She was persuaded to allow Zola to go on with his double life, but she cannot have enjoyed seeing a sensual young woman with a distinct physical resemblance to her former maid appearing as the central female character, first as a lover, then as a blooming mother, in Zola's subsequent novels. She was always loyal, though, and after the shock of Zola's death she fulfilled the prophecy of his novel "Joie de Vivre," and became a second mother to the children.

The fact that Zola wanted a child and Cézanne had one provides only a partial understanding of "L'Oeuvre," which is, fundamentally, a novel about

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the anxieties of artistic inheritance rather than those of genetic propagation. Early in the book, in the glorious, embattled eighteen-sixties, Claude's paintings, like Cézanne's, are dark portraits and interiors, with some kinship to Manet and to the turbulent spirit of Zola's work. But in the eighteen-seventies Cézanne and Claude began to paint outdoors. For several years, sometimes every day, Cézanne worked beside Pissarro. He referred to that kindly Jewish anarchist as "*le bon Dieu.*" Cézanne's palette lightened and clarified, and he began to work incessantly on the problem of how color could make form. At the same time, Zola came under the influence of Flaubert, also an artist who worked in the light of day, toward beautiful forms and slow, considered transformations. For Cézanne, this change brought with it the relief of coming closer to his true way of working, but for Zola the principles of Flaubert were antithetical to the raw, crowded manner in which he worked best. He began to visit his frustrations on his old friends.

In 1879, the year in which Zola wrote his article lauding Flaubert's "Sentimental Education," he suddenly declared in print, after years of extravagant praise, that Manet's "hand is not the equal of his eye," that "his canvases are imperfect and uneven," and that "form alone sustains new ideas and methods"—this coming from the same man who had always claimed that form was not important for his own work, and that he "disliked the Greeks," with their "idealization of form." In 1880, after having published an armful of articles commending Monet for his effects of light, Zola said, "Monsieur Monet has given in too much to his own facility of production," and admonished the painter that it is long study "that makes solid work"—this from someone who wrote a novel every year, often within four or five months. And, in articles published during that year and the next, Zola asserted again and again, in words he would repeat in "L'Oeuvre," that "not one artist of this group has realized, forcefully and definitively, the new idea that they all proclaim. . . . They are all precursors, the man of genius has not been born."

The possibility that a genius had been born, and was then working in the very hills in which the two men had grown up together, was perhaps intolerable to Zola, especially as his doubts about his own work grew. In "L'Oeuvre," the writer Sandoz tells the painter Claude that he is "never satisfied with the day's work, condemning already the book under way, judging it inferior to its older brothers, forging for myself tortures of the pages, the sentences, the words, so much so that the commas themselves take on an ugliness that makes me suffer." And in the notes for "L'Oeuvre" Zola wrote, "Knowing the work is imperfect but submitting oneself to it, with a great sadness. Always going ahead, short joys, continued anguish, throwing the books, going to the end, not wanting to stop oneself, not being able to reread. My whole confession." Zola had given his whole confession once before, in his first and very autobiographical novel, "The Confessions of Claude," which had been dedicated to Cézanne and another friend, and written in the form of letters to them. Zola had also signed his first articles about art with the name Claude. In "L'Oeuvre," too, the confessions of Claude are, in part, Zola's own. For Claude's artistic project is not Cézanne's careful undertaking but Zola's Balzacian enterprise, "the dream of pages of immense modern decoration, a fresco covering the whole epoch." And when the painter fails at this project the failure is not Cézanne's nightmare but Zola's. Claude's failure manages to express at once the two great fears that vied in Zola's heart: the fear that Cézanne was the great artist of their time, and the fear that he wasn't. If he was, then Zola's approach might be all wrong. And, if he wasn't, then there was no one left for Zola to believe in.

Losing Cézanne had remained among Zola's most terrible fears, and in "L'Oeuvre" he acted on his instinct to cure his fears by plunging into them, or even by making them materialize. Still, he may never have entirely given up hope. Joachim Gasquet, in his book on Cézanne, reports that he saw Zola around 1900, and that Zola said "in his own words," though they sound much more like the words of Gasquet, "I even begin to have a better understanding of his painting, which I have always enjoyed, but which eluded me for a long time because I thought it was frenzied, whereas it has an incredible sincerity and truthfulness." If this was Zola's final understanding of his friend's work, it came very late. Even in 1896, when Zola mentioned Cézanne once more in print, in the last piece he ever wrote about painting, an article to which Gasquet unkindly drew Cézanne's attention, Zola had said, "I grew up almost in the same cradle with my friend, my brother, Paul Cézanne, whom one looks at today only to discern the elements of genius in a great, aborted painter."

In the end, it was Cézanne who was called on to play Sandoz in the friendship's final scene. The battle for which Émile Zola is best remembered, the Dreyfus Affair, came in the decade after

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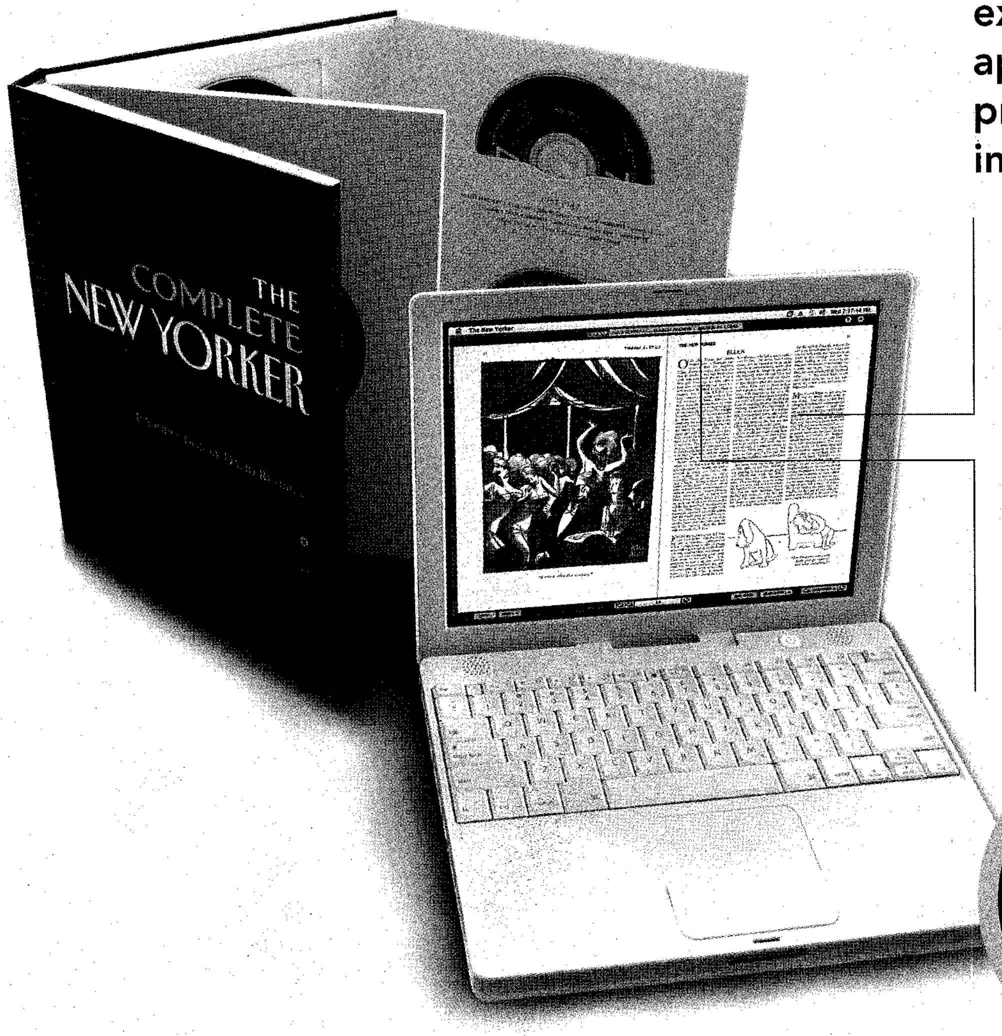

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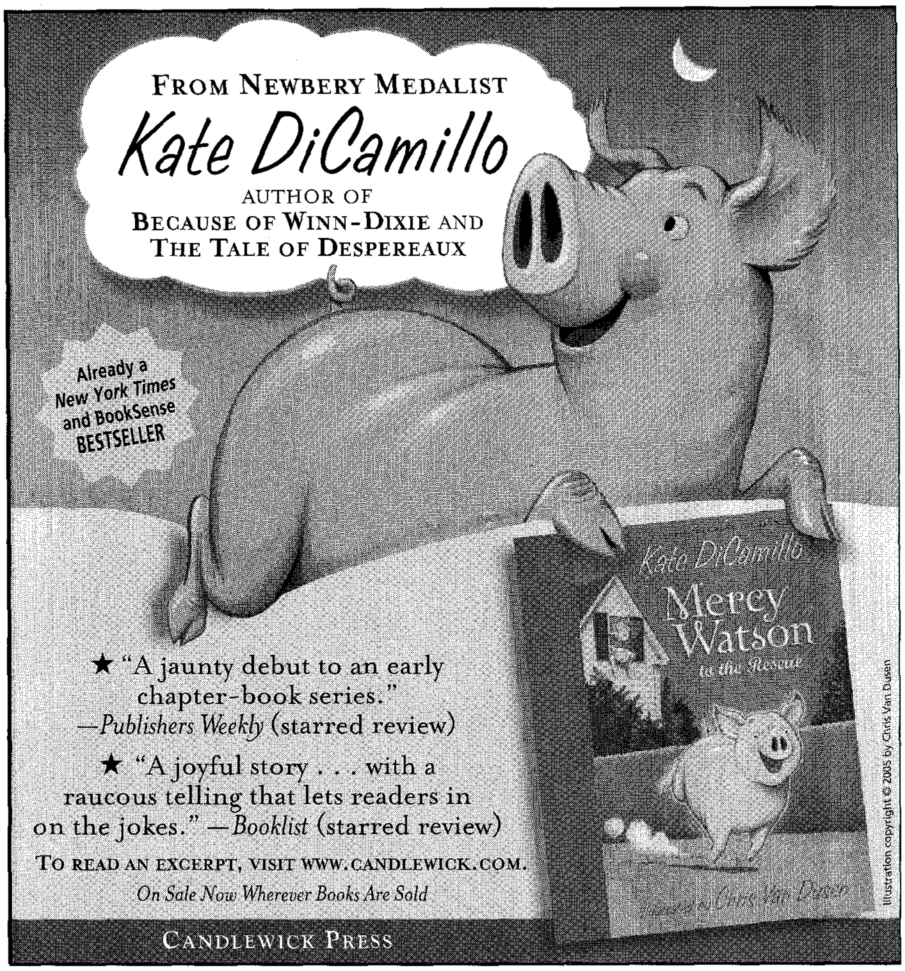
"L'Oeuvre." France had watched Dreyfus's trial for treason with largely approving attention; the Army captain had been condemned, publicly stripped of his commission, and sent to prison on Devil's Island; the few Dreyfusards were casting about for some means of reopening the case, which, despite the appearance of new evidence, the government refused to do. Coming at this juncture, Zola's "J'Accuse" had a seismic effect. He received thousands of letters of support, and a number of death threats. Within three weeks, he was himself on trial, prosecuted by the French government for "defamation," and summarily convicted. Convinced that he could do more for the cause in exile than in prison, Zola spent a laborious year in England. He returned to France in time to see the government pardon Dreyfus, but did not live to see Dreyfus restored to his commission in the Army.

Zola died of asphyxiation, in his bedroom in the middle of the night, poisoned by carbon monoxide from a blocked chimney. He was sixty-two. Alexandrine, who was with him, was badly stricken but survived. The police found no evidence of malign intent and were left to conclude that the strange death was accidental. Fifty years later, a man wrote to *Libération* and told the story of an anti-Dreyfus friend who had confessed on his deathbed that he and his roofing crew, while working on the building next door, had blocked the Zolas' flue, returning early the next morning to remove the block. Many scholars believe that the writer gave his life for the Dreyfus Affair, in which his part reads like the lived version of a Zola novel: a wrongful conviction, a dark and occluding prejudice, a lone battler, a trial that changes the course of human affairs, and the battler killed in the fight.

When the news of Zola's death reached Cézanne, the painter, known for being out "*sur le motif*" every single day of his life, had no one to whom he could turn and say, "Let us go and work." Instead, he closed the door of his studio and all day long was heard keening inside. Four years later, in 1906, a statue of Zola was dedicated in Aix. At the edge of the crowd, several people noticed a grizzled older man weeping, and recognized Cézanne. ♦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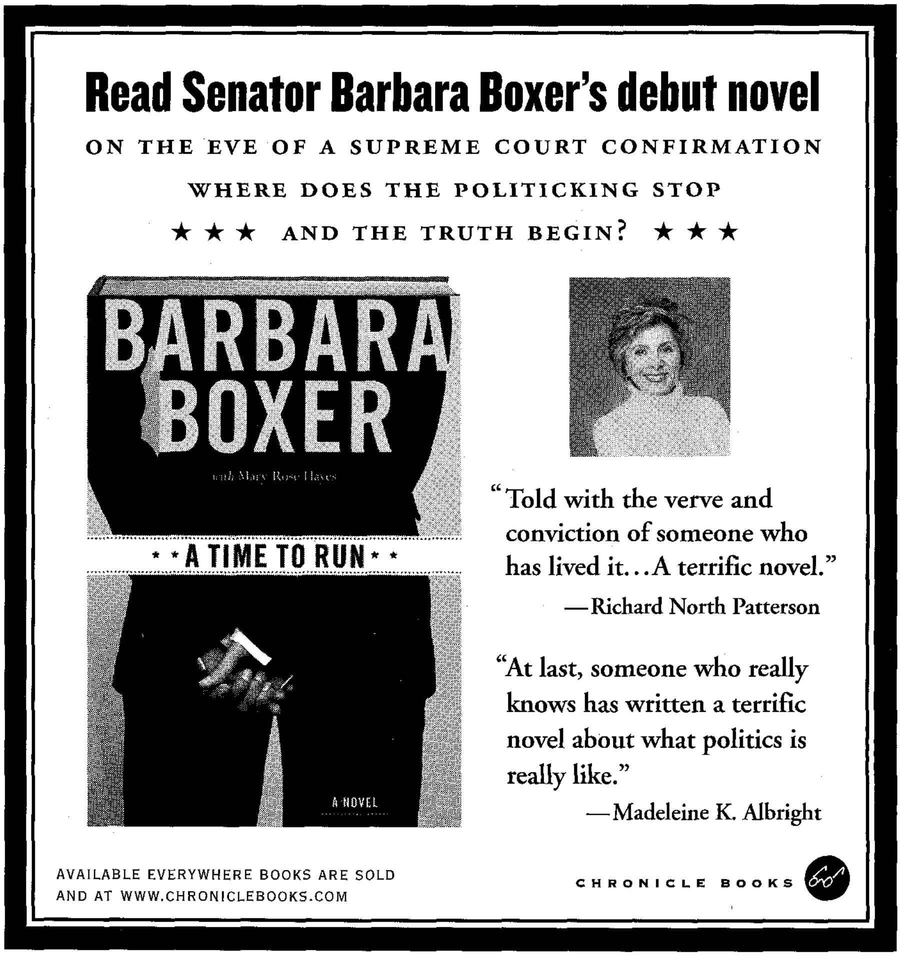
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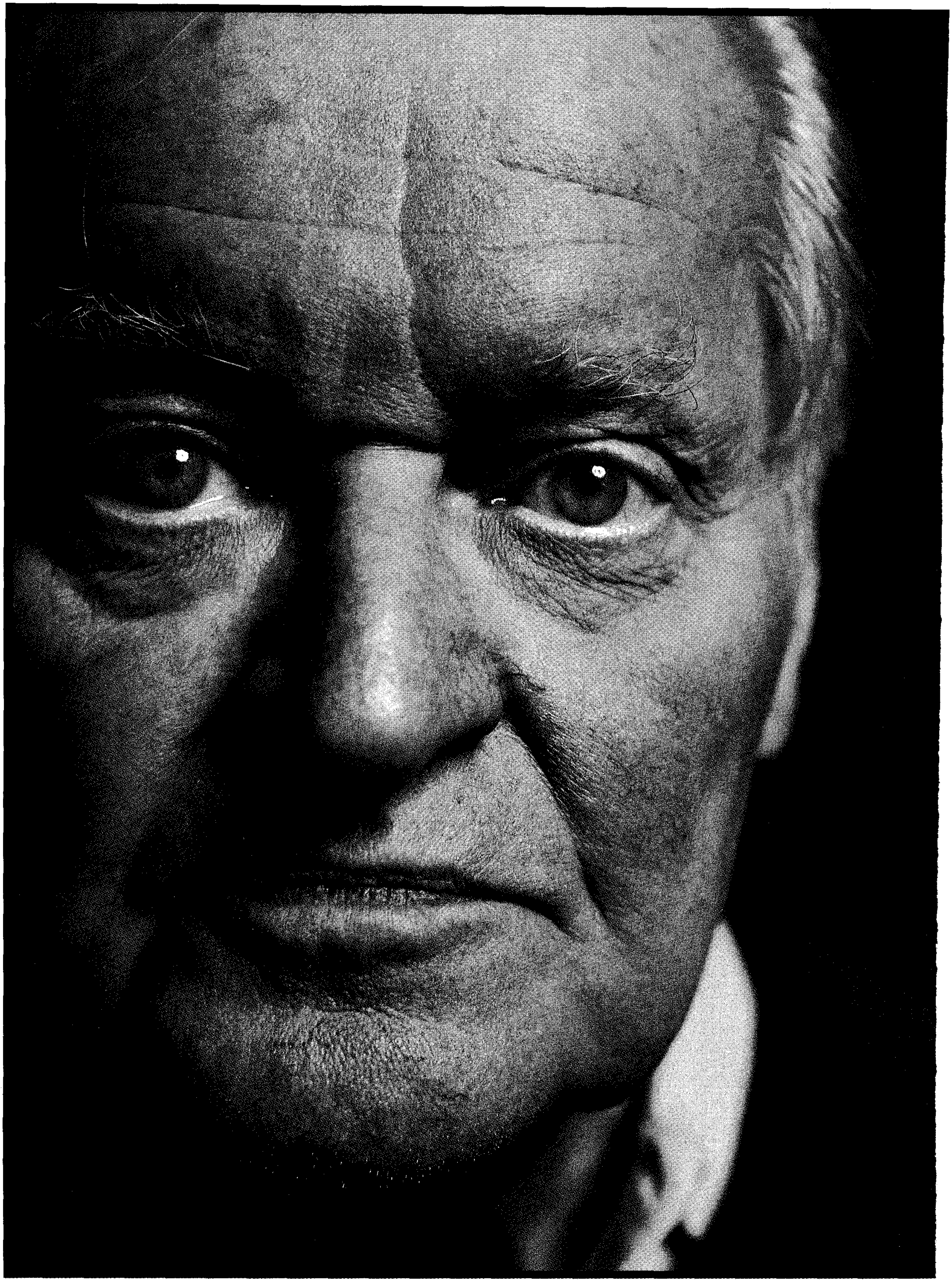


PRESENT WAKING LIFE

Becoming John Ashbery.

BY LARISSA MACFARQUHAR

It's late already, five or five-thirty. John Ashbery is sitting at his typewriter but not typing. He picks up his cup of tea and takes two small sips because it's still quite hot. He puts it down. He's supposed to write some poetry today. He woke up pretty late this morning and has been futzing around ever since. He had some coffee. He read the newspaper. He dipped into a couple of books: a Proust biography that he bought five years ago but just started reading because it suddenly occurred to him to do so, a novel by Jean Rhys that he recently came across in a secondhand bookstore—he's not a systematic reader. He flipped on the television and watched half of something dumb. He didn't feel up to leaving the apartment—it was muggy and putrid out, even for New York in the summer. He was aware of a low-level but continuous feeling of anxiety connected with the fact that he hadn't started writing yet and didn't have an idea. His mind flitted about. He thought about a Jean Hélion painting that he'd seen recently at a show. He considered whether he should order in dinner again from a newish Indian restaurant on Ninth Avenue that he likes. (He won't go out. He's seventy-eight. He doesn't often go out these days.) On a trip to the bathroom he noticed that he needed a haircut. He talked on the phone to a poet friend who was sick. By five o'clock, though, there was no avoiding the fact that he had only an hour or so left before the working day would be over, so he put a CD in the stereo and sat down at his desk. He sees that there's a tiny spot on the wall that he's never noticed before. It's only going to take him half an hour or forty minutes to whip out something short once he gets going, but getting going, that's the hard part.

His study is a small, unprepossessing room. On its white walls he has hung a few works by painters he knows—Jane Freilicher, Trevor Winkfield, Hélion. An old Biedermeier daybed stands against the back wall, cluttered with boxes and piles of paper. On the wall that he faces when he sits at his desk hangs a framed collage of standard Victorian etchings—ladies in bustles and hats, cherubs, men with walking sticks. Stuck in the bottom of the frame is a postcard reproduction of Parmigianino's "Self-Portrait in a Convex Mirror," the sixteenth-century painting that he wrote his famous poem about. To the left of the desk, on a shelf, is a small collection of cheap china figurines, characters from nineteen-thirties comic strips; some have broken necks, their heads lolling. On the desk itself is a Penguin Rhyming Dictionary, which he used recently in translating some Baudelaire. The room is on the ninth floor and the window is closed because he has the air-conditioner on, but he can hear faint noises coming up from the street.

He has an indistinct, meagre notion in his head that he thinks might work for a short poem: a few unconnected words—detritus of his day—or an ordinary phrase that he's suddenly realized is quite weird ("cut the mustard," for instance—what does it mean to cut mustard, and why is it only ever used in the negative?). Or it isn't words that he has in his mind but a shape, a hazy sense of the physical thing, the page or stack of pages, that his poem will become.

Or else his mind is blank. He hasn't even the germ of an idea but he has to force himself to write something or he'll never get anything done. He stares at the paper in his typewriter and is reminded for the millionth time that one of the worst things about being a poet is that you're confronted by an empty page, a nothing-at-all, practically every

Ashbery is interested in the making of poetry, the act of writing, more than the poetry itself, and rarely revisits finished poems unless he has to. Photograph by Steve Pyke.

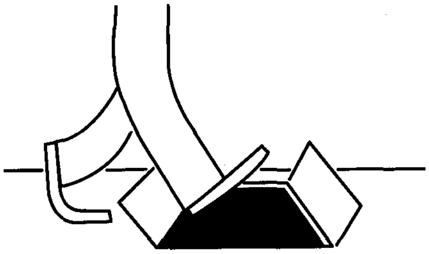
time you sit down to write (unless you're in the middle of a long poem, which you aren't usually). He reaches for a book by one of the poets he keeps around for dehydrated moments like this one because they get his poetry going—Mandelstam, Pasternak, Hölderlin. He leafs through it hopefully. They do the trick for him, whatever the trick is, perhaps because their poems seem to him to begin in the middle and wander around and finally break off without any kind of formal conclusion, and that somehow makes starting a poem of his own feel easier, as if he'd already begun it, or as if they had. (Several of Hölderlin's fragment poems actually end in commas—an idea he liked so much that he stole it.) Music also helps to get things started, which is why he always turns it on when he writes (usually twentieth-century classical). He doesn't listen to it with his full attention, obviously, but he doesn't block it out either. He finds that the way it contains narratives and arguments without articulable terms—so that after you've listened to a symphony, say, you feel you've understood something but you can't say what it is—makes it similar to his poetry, which makes it somehow stimulating.

What he is trying to do (and here the metaphors get a little screwy, but these are the pictures that come to him) is jump-start a poem by lowering a bucket down into what feels like a kind of underground stream flowing through his mind—a stream of continuously flowing poetry, or perhaps poetic stuff would be a better way to put it. Whatever the bucket brings up will be his poem. (This image was suggested to him by a novel by the Austrian writer Heimito von Doderer, a contemporary of Musil and rather like him.) Since he is always dipping the bucket into the same stream his poems will resemble one another, but because the stream varies according to climatic conditions—what's on his mind, the weather, interruptions—they will also be different.

There have been many times in his life when he felt completely stuck, when the poetry seemed to dry up completely, but the longest and worst began shortly after he graduated from college and lasted more than a year. Then he happened to go to a John Cage concert and heard "Music of Changes"—nearly an hour of banging on a piano alternating with periods of silence, as dictated by a score that Cage had put together using the I Ching so that it would be determined by chance rather than by his choice. The music seemed to him to be full of powerful meanings, and the idea of composing by chance made him think about writing in a completely different way. It made him want to go right back home and start work. Ever since, he has felt that what he calls "managed chance" is the right method for him.

The word "managed" is important: although he, like Cage, has experimented with the I Ching, he doesn't let it dictate poems the way James Merrill used a Ouija board. He summons chance but never entirely submits to it: chance occurrences are always filtered through his mind. He leaves the telephone on while he's writing, for instance, and if someone calls in the middle a bit of the conversation may end up in the poem. For poetic purposes he likes situations where he is likely to encounter the peculiar and the unexpected. When he was younger he used to spend his mornings strolling around downtown (he can write for only two hours a day at most, so there is always the problem of what to do with the rest of his time). He ventures into the nether regions of the newspaper and rummages in secondhand bookstores. When he teaches, he gives his students exercises that artificially induce this effect—he'll give them a text in a language that none of them know and tell them to translate it into English. (He used to use hieroglyphics but found that he was getting a lot of poems about eyes and fish, so now he uses Finnish.)

Because chance encounters are important, he works well in New York: its sirens and distractions are useful to him. In fact, the sirens and distractions, and the way they affect and prompt him when he is sitting at his desk, are, in a sense, what much of his work is about. He is interested in the making of poetry, the act of writing, more than the poetry itself, which is why, when the work is over, he revises very little and rarely revisits finished poems unless he has to, for a reading. Despite his otherwise uncanny memory he can't recite any of his poems by heart, even ones that he wrote last week.



He begins to type:

We were warned about spiders, and the
occasional famine.
We drove downtown to see our
neighbors. None of them were home.
We nestled in yards the municipality had
created,
reminisced about other, different places—
but were they? Hadn't we known it all
before?

In vineyards where the bee's hymn
drowns the monotony,
we slept for peace, joining in the great
run.
He came up to me.
It was all as it had been,
except for the weight of the present,
that scuttled the pact we made with
heaven.
In truth there was no cause for rejoicing,
nor need to turn around, either.
We were lost just by standing,
listening to the hum of wires overhead.

Ashbery lives in two places: a rental apartment in Chelsea and an ornate, turreted Colonial-revival house in Hudson, New York, that he bought quite cheaply in 1978. The apartment consists of a series of plain white rooms in a white brick building that could be any of a dozen nearly identical white brick buildings in Manhattan. He has lived in the building for more than thirty years. Its generic, neutral quality, its perfect absence of personality, suits him. For this reason he has furnished his apartment in a casual way, avoiding the bejewelled precision of his Hudson house. The apartment's living room, for instance, contains two late-nineteenth-century sofas, one nondescript, squishy modern sofa with a matching chair, and a glass Barcelona coffee table. A tall pale-wood CD rack is attached to the wall next to a stereo; an unhealthy-looking spider plant stands on a side table. On the wall over the modern sofa hangs an early Jane Freilicher still-life of which he is especially fond. Every now and again he lends one of his paintings for a show; when a painting is taken out of the Hudson house, determining a suitable replacement can be a matter for lengthy rumination—at times the whole room has had to be rehung—but when

FILIGRANE

"I've had it up to here with water, and now
further spokes are coming undone.
Get me a copy editor, or a good stiff
drink, if you will. Our resources have been on hold
for a generation, and this is the result.
As usual, the region, a 'sensitive area,'
is being evacuated. No one knows how
long their toehold can hold out."

Our representative will be contacting you,
but meanwhile it is important not to move
or in any way betray your whereabouts to the listening
enemy. His sense of place is long,
but not endless. Mirage control has sealed the borders
with light and the endless diffidence light begets.
You may confess your sins to your mother
but not your aunts and uncles—one would fear
the cauterized result, and in this ugly, cliff-dwelling
universe risk bumping against the question again
in a minor key with too many sharps in it.
Please, would somebody try to telephone the delivery station
and unload the tears at the proper address?
It's *West* Fifth, not Southwest. A snowman
can point you toward the steps. Wheedle on
for just a little bit.

But I've been asked silly questions before. Now is not the
moment to turn on a dime, or even ask what saint
to pray to, given that they are all alike,
that is, holy. In the latest bewildering formulation.

—*John Ashbery*

he lends a painting from the apartment he just slaps something else up on the wall that happens to be handy.

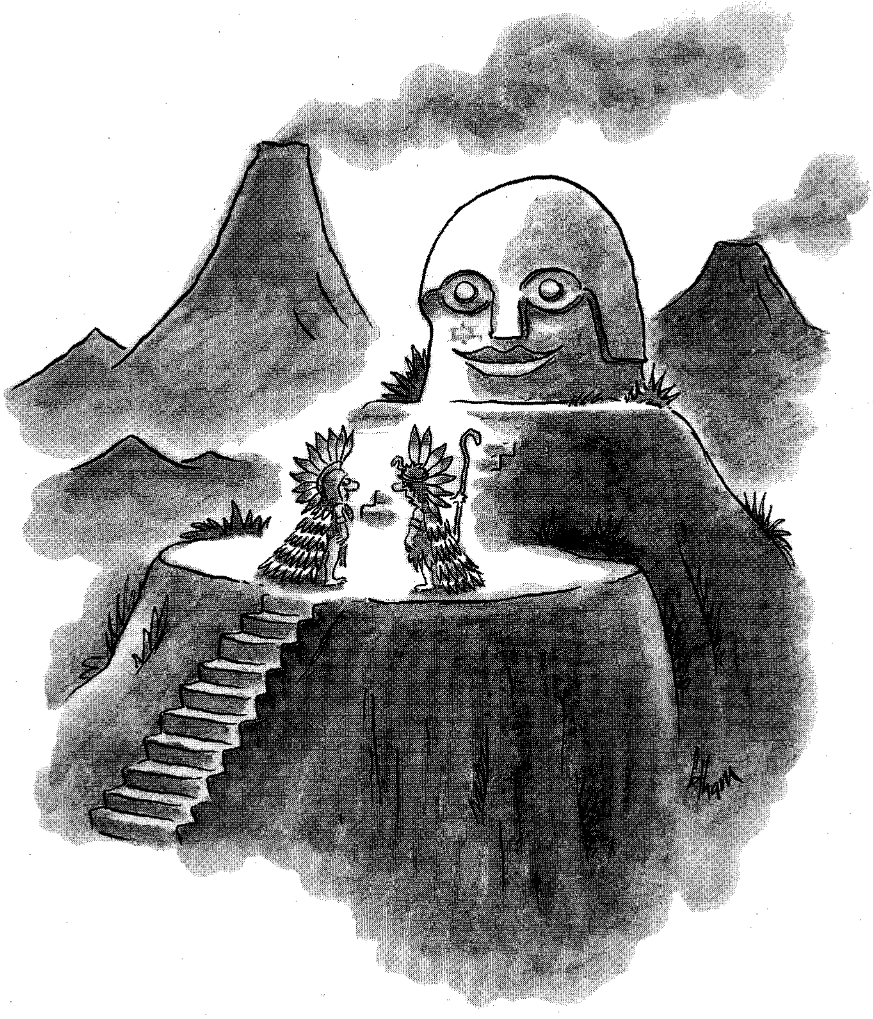
Ashbery lives with his partner of thirty-five years, David Kermani. Kermani has observed Ashbery's behavior in Hudson and in Chelsea and has formulated a theory about the difference. He has noticed, for instance, that while in Hudson Ashbery keeps the formal rooms downstairs perfectly tidy and knows exactly where each object belongs, in Chelsea this is not the case. "Living with John is very difficult," he says. "Everything needs to be open and nothing is ever closed. Drawers. Cabinets. Closet doors. Everything! All possibilities must be available at all times, and there's no order to it—it's not, this stack is for this and that stack is for that." He has also observed that Ashbery tends to write new poems in Chelsea, whereas in Hudson he usually turns to things that require a different sort of attention, like translations and criticism.

The apartment's bland, anonymous quality, Kermani has decided, along with its cultivated disorder, makes it an undetermined, freeing place to be, the sort of place where any aesthetic is as appropriate as any other; where Ashbery's eye may chance on a surprising conjunction of objects and his mind can meander in unexpected directions. The Hudson house, on the other hand, is like a strong poetic form: its architecture dictates within narrow parameters the style and arrangement of appropriate furnishings, and Ashbery takes pleasure in that restriction, as he does in the constraints of a sestina or a pantoum. It's not a matter of historical accuracy: he mixes furniture from different periods, and indeed the house itself is a blend of styles—the library with a beamed ceiling, the massive, gloomy front hall with a dark-wood coffered ceiling, the three-panelled stained-glass window at the landing of the grand front staircase, the wood panelling and the built-in china cabinets and buffet in the dining room, the French-style music room. But only certain objects in certain combinations will fit harmoniously in those spaces, and he has spent many hours looking for them in antique stores (waiting for something to arrest him by chance rather than searching with a particular thing in mind) and, once he has found them, he spends many more hours arranging and rearranging them. Even now that the house is furnished, he fiddles and fusses, taking objects out and putting them away again, inserting new ones. He revises endlessly. But he rarely spends time in the house's formal rooms—he works or reads upstairs in what Kermani calls "the living quarters." The downstairs, Kermani has concluded, is less a place to live in than a visual poem.

Kermani and Ashbery met in 1970, when Ashbery was forty-two and Kermani was twenty-three. Although they recently celebrated thirty-five years together they have not always been as much together as they are now: the seventies were the seventies, and Kermani has been engaged to women a couple of times along the way. At first Kermani wasn't particularly interested in poetry, but after they'd been together for a couple of years somebody asked Ashbery for a bio, and Kermani, reading his standard statement, decided that it was inadequate and set out to write something better. He started rooting around in Ashbery's papers and the more he rooted the more engrossed he grew. He decided that the art reviews, which Ashbery viewed as strictly work for hire, were actually a key to understanding the poetry, because although Ashbery always refused to explain his poems, many of the things he said about other people's work could be applied to his own. Kermani concluded that if only people could see the same connections that he did they would understand the poetry better: what was needed was a bibliography. He set out to write one, and became more and more involved in the project until in the end he put together a volume that listed, as far as possible, everything that Ashbery had ever written, down to the smallest introduction or pamphlet; all his published remarks; his translations; recordings of him reading his poetry; his few appearances on film; settings of his poetry to music; portraits painted of him; art works that incorporated his poems; a citation in Webster's; and mentions of him in poems by other people. In an effort to make sure that it conformed to scholarly protocols, he ended up getting a master's degree in library science. The book was finally published in 1976.

Kermani has been observing Ashbery and the way he works for a long time, and now that has become, in a sense, his profession. (He used to be an art dealer—he was the director of the Tibor de Nagy Gallery for five years, until his father demanded that he work in the family carpet business.) Ashbery has two assistants and Kermani supervises them, making sure that each draft of a poem is dated and filed and that Ashbery's letters are preserved on acid-free paper and properly organized. Because he became fascinated by the Hudson house he has started a foundation whose mission is to preserve it and to investigate more generally how artists' environments relate to their work. He has overseen visits to the house by university seminars interested in this subject, and soon he hopes to turn part of a nearby building he owns into guest quarters for visiting scholars. A few months ago he started noting down what music Ashbery was listening to when he composed which poem, but then Ashbery said he was making him too self-conscious and asked him to stop.

If one of the worst things about being a poet is the unpleasantly frequent confrontation with empty pieces of paper, another is the money. Ashbery didn't have any money to begin with, and even now that he's a celebrated and canonical poet he still can't make enough from his poetry to get by. In 1989 he agreed to sell his papers to Harvard, and that helped for a while. He's always had a day job. He used to write art reviews, and for the past thirty years he has taught writing, first at Brooklyn College and now at Bard, even though he doesn't much like being a teacher (he didn't like writing art reviews either). When he first started teaching, many of his students didn't know much about him or his poetry—most were writing confessional poems, or were enamored of other styles that were fashionable at the time. "Back in the late seventies and early eighties there was a kind of Iowa Writers' Workshop type of poetry that was very identifiable," he says. "It was sort of wistful, talking to your wife or visiting your mother in a nursing home, mentioning a lot of interstate-highway numbers, all in a rather bland, acceptable style. I'd say, 'This is a very acceptable thing you've written, but is that all you want to be?' " People are often surprised that he still has a day job, but it's the nature of the business. Books of poetry just don't sell very well. Even Allen Ginsberg, one of the most popular poets of the twentieth century, had to teach. Ashbery reckons that Billy Collins may be the only recent poet able to earn a living from poetry alone.



"He's good with crops but slow to respond in an emergency."

For this reason, even though he doesn't much enjoy reading his poetry in public, he often agrees to do so. One dank afternoon he made his way downtown to the New School to attend a class in its summer program, part of a four-session seminar on his work. It was being taught by Rebecca Wolff, a poet and the founder of the literary journal *Fence*. Wolff was in her mid-thirties and wore her hair cut unevenly to her ears. She had a small tattoo on her right ankle and another on her left knee. She was a huge Ashbery fan and quite nervous about the class. Ashbery was wearing cotton trousers and a short-sleeved shirt. He usually dresses conventionally, and his habitual public expression is one of mild bemusement, but his features work against this look: his eyes are a rimy blue, his nose is grandiose and fiercely convex, his chin juts sharply forward, and there is a big gap between his two front teeth. If he were angry, his face would be terrifying. He began by reading "A Nice Presentation," a prose poem from his book "Chinese Whispers," from 2002.

"I have a friendly disposition but am forgetful, though I tend to forget only important things," he read. "Several mornings ago I was lying in my bed listening to a sound of leisurely hammering coming from a nearby building. For some reason it made me think of spring which it is. Listening I heard also a man and woman talking together. I couldn't hear very well but it seemed they were discussing the work that was being done. This made me smile, they sounded like good and dear people and I was slipping back into dreams when the phone rang. No one was there."

His voice was comforting to listen to, quiet, bland, flat, and good-natured, inflected with his homey upstate New York accent. He read at a walking pace, unhurried enough to be easily understood but not so slow as to be ponderous. He could have been reading a bedtime story. Later, in response to a request, he read "Interesting People of Newfoundland," a poem from his most recent book, "Where Shall I Wander."

"We took long rides into the countryside, but were always stopped by some bog or other," he read.

Then it was time to return home, which
was OK with everybody,
each of them having discovered that he
or she could use a little shuteye.

In short there was a higher per capita
percentage of interesting people
there than almost anywhere on earth,
but the population was small,
which meant not too many interesting
people. But for all that
we loved each other and had interesting
times
picking each other's brain and drying
nets on the wooden docks.

The students sat quietly and listened. There were no laughs at the laugh lines, not even a smug poetry chuckle, which was unusual for one of his readings. He read a few more poems, and then it was time for questions. A young woman raised her hand.

"I have a New York School question, which is: how do you feel being part of this colossal entity?" she said. (The New York School of poets usually denotes Ashbery, Frank O'Hara, Kenneth Koch, James Schuyler, and Barbara Guest.) "I mean, for young poets it's definitely colossal. For me it is. And also, how do you feel about the huge number of poets who count you as an influence?"

"Well, we never thought that our work would even be published, let alone thought of as a school," Ashbery said. "And it wasn't until I guess I was in my mid-thirties that the term was coined—it was actually invented by John Myers, the art dealer who published our first pamphlets, because he thought that the prestige of the New York School of painters would rub off on the poets that he'd published."

A middle-aged woman with curly black hair wearing jewelled sandals and a brown miniskirt had a question.

"Do you ever feel baffled sometimes yourself by what you've written?" she asked.

"Yes," he said.

"Oh, good, because I do, too," she said, clearly relieved.

"You're not alone," he told her.

He called on a young woman in a tailored white shirt and precisely creased trousers. "Not all of us in this room are poetry students," she said. "There are some of us who are fiction writers, and so I feel bad about the elementary nature of my question. I understand fiction, the way you can get absorbed in a book and get lost in a character, but I was wondering if you could help me to read poetry, because I find it very hard to get into and I was wondering if you might help me out."

He was momentarily stumped.

"Well, first of all you really don't have to if you don't want to," he told her gently. The students laughed. "As Marianne Moore says, I too dislike it; there are other things more important than all this fiddle. But if you're liking it enough to pick it up and go ahead, maybe one thing would be to forget yourself while you're reading it and not think that in order to appreciate it you have to have read a book about it. That's the way I read. And if you're not liking it put it aside, which I also do."

It's 1970. Ashbery is forty-two. He doesn't yet live in his white brick building but he is nearby, in an apartment on West Twenty-fifth Street. His hair is thick and dark and longer than it usually is (though not long for 1970). He has grown a very full mustache, practically a handlebar. He has temporarily abandoned his conventional look and has started dressing in a leather jacket and conspicuous shirts. He has just met a young man named David Kermani.

To make a living, he is working as an editor at *ARTnews*. He is as pressed for cash as ever. His father has died and he has to arrange home care for his mother. She is beginning to deteriorate mentally, drinking quite a lot of sherry though she never drank at all while his father was alive, but she is still lucid enough so that he takes her out in the city fairly often, to dinner or to the theatre, which she loves; twice he has taken her to Europe.

His *ARTnews* job entails a rather demanding after-hours existence. The galleries close around five-thirty, and before six most nights he is at a bar with someone having a drink, or on his way to an opening or a party. At the height of the season he'll go to two or three events a night, sometimes running into a gallery for only a few minutes—just long enough, as the half-joke went, to be seen by ten people. This is not all duty, of course. He has many close painter friends—Larry Rivers, Alex Katz, Jane Freilicher, Fairfield Porter—though not as many as he used to when Frank O'Hara was alive. (O'Hara was hit by a car on Fire Island four years ago, when he was forty. Ashbery still misses him a great deal. "It seemed so improbable," he says. "He always used to say, 'Everybody worries about dying—it's not going to happen! You're not going to die!' ") He has always been a drinker but now he drinks a truly prodigious amount, even by art-world standards. When he's drunk he lurches about and hugs people and talks a blue streak. He's funny and barbed. The next morning he is shy and polite again.

He writes poetry on the weekends. He has just published his fifth book of poems, "The Double Dream of Spring," but few people know who he is and, of those who do, many think his poetry is ridiculous. His third book, "Rivers and Mountains," was nominated for a National Book Award four years ago, which was certainly encouraging, but poetry still feels to him like a pretty thankless business. He recently received an exceptionally spiteful write-up by one J. W. Hughes in the *Saturday Review*. "The Doris Day of modernist poetry, he plays nasty Symbolist-Imagist tricks on his audience while maintaining a façade of earnest innocuousness," Hughes wrote. (The Doris Day remark apparently alluded to the fact that he'd been around for a long time but had yet to lose his political virginity by getting involved in the antiwar movement, as many other poets had.) Some of his lines, Hughes continued, "have about as much poetic life as a refrigerated plastic flower." Nasty reviews wound him, even stupid ones like this by someone he's never heard of.

Nonetheless, he has an idea for a new poem or, rather, three new poems (three being a nice number). He envisions them as three empty oblong boxes. He has no notion yet what the boxes are to be filled with. He always finds it so difficult to come up with something to say! He complains about this to his analyst, a Chilean named Carlos who is quite chatty and likes to give him advice even though he claims to be a Freudian. Carlos suggests that he write about the people who've meant most to him in his life—not the people themselves but what they make him think of. This is somewhat helpful.

In search of a spark to get him going he begins to read philosophy and religious books—"The Cloud of Unknowing," Lao Tzu, Sir Thomas Browne, Pascal. He doesn't immerse himself or read them straight through; that's not the idea. He dips into them in the morning at random, waiting for some word or phrase or concept to jump out at him. Slowly, the first of the three poems begins to resolve in his mind's eye, details appearing. It will be a long prose poem, his first—prose rather than verse because he wants to see what poetic possibilities he can find in ordinary language. He wants to play around with a jumble of styles and voices—regular people talking, journalese, pop culture, cracker-barrel philosophy, high-flown poetic diction. What will all that sound like thrown together? Will it sound like the world, which is always a mixture of those things?

One day he begins to write. He calls the poem "The New Spirit." Once he gets started, once the page is no longer blank, things go well. He coasts along. The words come easily, and because it's prose it goes on and on without any line breaks. "It's just beginning," he types. "Now it's started to work again. The visitation, was it more or less over. No, it had not yet begun, except as a preparatory dream which seemed to have the rough texture of life, but which dwindled into starshine like all the unwanted memories. There was no holding on to it. But for all that we ought to be glad, no one really needed it, yet it was not utterly worthless, it taught us the forms of this our present waking life, the manners of the unreachable."

He types like mad, composing as fast as he can type, which is fast. He barely thinks about what he's doing—"Remnants of the old atrocity subsist, but they are converted into ingenious shifts in scenery, a sort of 'English garden' effect, to give the required air of naturalness, pathos and hope. Are you sad about something today?" It feels to him more like transcription than like composition, though not the so-called automatic writing that the Surrealists claimed to practice—not the direct voice of his unconscious speaking, as if there were such a thing. Rather, as the words come to him from somewhere inside he becomes aware of them and makes a few improvements. (He likes the idea of words coming out of his unconscious but he isn't a purist about it—every unconscious needs an editor.) As he gets further into the poem his margins get thinner and thinner and he stops separating paragraphs until by the time he's eight pages into it the margins are just a fraction of an inch wide on either side and the page is a solid mass of type.

At some point he stops bothering to read over what he's written already before starting to write again, even though he's only working on weekends, so it might be five or six days since he's last worked on it. It isn't that he remembers it so well—often he doesn't remember it at all—he just feels that reading it over won't make much difference, seeing as what he's going to write won't follow logically from what's gone before anyway. He has a sense that everything will cohere somehow, though, because it all comes from him. (Since this seems to work, from now on he sticks to this practice.) He types, "But the light continues to grow, the eternal disarray of sunrise, and one can now distinguish certain shapes such as haystacks and a clocktower. So it was true, everything was holding its breath because a surprise was on the way. It has already installed itself and begun to give orders: workmen are struggling to raise the main pole that supports the tent while over there others are watering the elephants, dressing down the horses."

He works for four or five months, and then it's as if a timer had gone off in his head and he realizes that the poem is finished. He reads the whole thing through. He finds a lot of passages that he doesn't like and strikes them out. He puts a line through the sentence "At this point an event of such glamor and such radiance took place that you forgot the name all over again," but later he changes his mind and restores it. He crosses out "chimpanzee" and substitutes "tame bear." He crosses out "Pay attention to this passage, it could mean war." He crosses out "It is like being 'taken around' by a guide, or like visiting a big house on a hill before its contents are auctioned. There is so much one may wish to learn, and it all stops here—in the head." He rereads a little stanza he wrote on the first page and decides that it has to go:

When you flushed the toilet
And the shit boiled up
You said, Now is the time to act,
Act! Before the turds of your endurance
Disappear forever, say something,
Anything! But you live by avoiding
From left to right, carving a road so,
Old man.

Even when he isn't stuck indoors trying to write, Ashbery finds the summer depressing. All year he waits for the warm weather, and then when it finally comes and the season reaches its maturity it immediately starts to diminish. The days get shorter again. Plants die and rot. There's a passage in Thomas De Quincey's "Confessions of an English Opium-Eater" that he's always reminded of when June rolls around, in which De Quincey says that walking on beautiful summer evenings always fills him with thoughts of death. Ashbery himself is not much given to walks these days, especially not idyllic rural ones. Walking is difficult for him—he hasn't been able to move with ease since he nearly died of a

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—John Ashbery

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place. (It's the way Scarlett describes Melanie in "Gone with the Wind.") He means the way that some weak, passive people manage to control others and steer events as effectively as those who try to dominate.

Chester Ashbery was an amateur craftsman—he liked to make things out of wood. He built a coffee table and a puppet theatre and a sailboat. But he had a terrible temper and his children were afraid of him. "Though he was very nice and basically a very good person, he would erupt unpredictably and slap us, my brother and me, around, and so I was always wary about whether this was going to happen today," Ashbery says. "I guess I lived in a state of mild anxiety all the time as a child. My mother also suffered a lot from it. She used to cry, and it was upsetting for a child to see his mother cry. My father and I were never very close. When I was about three or four years old he said to me one day, 'Who do you love more, me or your mother?' and I said, 'My mother.' It seemed perfectly normal. But I think that was a turning point in that we became more distant after that."

The family went to church every Sunday, though they weren't particularly religious—it was the sociable thing to do. Ashbery still goes to church every now and again (he's Episcopalian). He forgot about religion for many years but he started going again around the time he turned fifty. "I think of myself as a religious person, a Christian, but I guess I'm probably what the religious right would call a 'cafeteria Christian'—I select the parts I like and ignore the others," he says. "There are certain elements of the church that I can't accept—like homosexuality is evil, for instance. I sort of feel that God wants you to select. I guess this is what I believe no matter how unlikely it seems that there really is a God."

Until he was seven he lived mostly with his maternal grandparents in Rochester, where there was a school for him to go to. Then his grandparents retired to the country and Ashbery moved back to Sodus, where there was almost no one to play with. He didn't really count his brother, who was younger than he and very different. For the rest of his childhood, he thought of those early years as a kind of golden age that could never happen again. When he was thirteen, his brother died of leukemia. The death

"Well, instead of discussing the book we could discuss why none of us had time to read it."

came as a shock, since no one had warned him that it was possible. The period afterward he still considers one of the most unhappy times of his life (and there have been many unhappy times—he is often depressed and has spent many years in analysis). "I was extremely lonely," he says. "I had very few friends. In school I was considered weird, which I was, I guess." With his brother gone, all his parents' attention was focussed on him, which wasn't a good thing. "I always felt that I was a disappointment to my parents, especially to my father," he says. "My brother loved sports and was very extroverted. He would I'm sure have been straight, have gotten married and had children, probably would have taken over the farm, which my father obviously wanted."

When he was partway through high school a benevolent neighbor paid to send him to Deerfield Academy, a boarding school in Massachusetts. Deerfield was then an old-fashioned sort of place, not particularly intellectual, but it was an improvement on Sodus. While there, Ashbery submitted two of his poems to the magazine *Poetry*, and received a one-word rejection note: "Sorry." Shortly afterward, the poems appeared in the magazine under another name (they had been sent in by a classmate using a pseudonym). He was appalled: the best poetry magazine in the country now thought that he was a plagiarist—clearly he would never make it as a poet.

Just before he left for college, at Harvard, his mother read one of his letters and discovered that he was gay. She brought it up one day in the car when the two of them were driving to visit a neighbor; she was very upset, and told him that he would be unhappy if he didn't change. But after that it seemed to him that she managed to forget the distressing information, for she continued to ask him about girlfriends as she always had, and never mentioned the subject again. He himself thought about it quite a bit. He'd been attracted to girls in high school, though he suspected that they weren't attracted back. "I've always felt conflicted about my sexuality, feeling that I shouldn't be homosexual, that I should try to change," he says. Shortly after college he went into psychoanalysis with this goal in mind, but he didn't have the money to continue at that point, so he stopped.

Several years after he graduated he won a Fulbright fellowship to study in France. He'd always wanted to go there: he'd read Proust in college, and then, a year earlier, a friend had shown him a strange book by someone called Raymond Roussel. His French wasn't very good, so he couldn't understand much of it, but he could see that it was a book-length poem of such lunatic complexity that it would be nearly impossible to read even if he did know the language—passages nested in passages nested in passages in a series of concentric parentheses that seemed to be the work of either a madman or a highly intelligent machine. There were many footnotes that themselves were divided by parenthetical interruptions. And the whole thing was, oddly, illustrated by some hack commercial artist, of the sort who might draw pictures for a children's textbook. He resolved to improve his French in order to be able to read it. (When he did, he coded the passages divided by parentheses by underlining them with colored pencils so that he could follow the thread.)

He had almost no money when he arrived in Paris, so he lived in a series of fleapit hotels for two dollars a night. But he loved being there—he would walk halfway across the city to pick up his mail at the American Express office just for the pleasure of it. It was difficult living in a place where he didn't speak the language, and during his first year in France he wrote very little. He felt deprived of hearing American spoken around him and he used to buy American magazines as a substitute. He made a little cash translating French thrillers and, upon request, adding sex scenes for the American market, under the pseudonym Jonas Berry, and he started writing art reviews for the *Herald Tribune*. Eventually he figured out how to start writing poetry again, but being surrounded by a strange language affected him strongly, and he ended up writing the fractured, dissonant poems that went into his second book, "The Tennis Court Oath" (1962):

Where then shall hope and fear their objects find?
The harbor cold to the mating ships,
And you have lost as you stand by the balcony
With the forest of the sea calm and gray beneath.
A strong impression torn from the descending light
But night is guilty. You knew the shadow
In the trunk was raving
But as you keep growing hungry you forget.
The distant box is open. A sound of grain

Poured over the floor in some
eagerness—we
Rise with the night let out of the box of
wind.

Many of his poems from that time he didn't like and still doesn't—he wrote them mostly as private experiments to clear his head of the way he'd thought about his poetry up to that point—but the poet John Hollander, who was on the poetry board at Wesleyan University Press, wrote and asked if he had any work to publish, so he sent what he had.

One evening in the spring after his arrival in France he was having a drink in a bar on the Rue du Cherche-Midi when he met Pierre Martory, a novelist and poet some years older than he was. They talked all evening, about Roussel among other things, and ended up moving in together. "He was unlike any other French person, especially French writer or intellectual, that I've met," Ashbery says. "He had a sort of American pragmatist outlook that the French don't seem to have. He was also very fascinated by America. He used to go to movies all the time." Ashbery, too, had always been obsessed with movies, and they went to a lot of them. They conducted their relationship in French and English jumbled up—rarely did either of them complete a sentence in only one language. Martory's English was very good, but he would make peculiar mistakes that Ashbery loved and stored up for future use. Sometimes Martory did this on purpose, translating French idioms literally into English, such as "You're running on my bean," which means, roughly, "You're getting my goat." Ashbery lived in France for ten years. Then, in 1964, his father died and he moved back to America to take care of his mother. Martory didn't want to leave Paris and, anyway, would not have allowed Ashbery to support him, so, with difficulty, they separated.

This is how Ashbery reads. When he sits down with a book of poems by somebody else he goes through it quickly. He forms a first impression of a poem almost at once, and if he isn't grabbed by it he'll flip ahead and read something else. But if he's caught up he'll keep going, still reading quite fast, not making any attempt to understand what's going on but feeling that on some other level something is clicking between him and the poem, something is working. He knows implicitly that he's getting it, though he would find it difficult to say at this point what, exactly, he's getting. It's the *sound* of the poem, though not literally so—it's not a matter of musicality or mellifluousness or anything like that, and he never reads poems aloud to himself—it's something like the sound produced by meaning, which lets you know that there's meaning there even though you don't know what it is yet. Later, if he likes the poem, he will go back and read it more carefully, trying to get at its meaning in a more conventional way, but it's really that first impression which counts. (He reads prose quite differently, particularly the sort of dense, baroque prose he loves, such as that of Proust or Henry James: extremely slowly, savoring every word.)

He would prefer to read poems only for himself. He dislikes writing poetry criticism. The evaluating impulse is totally foreign to him. He has no interest in developing a set of criteria by which he might decide whether a poem is good or bad, or good or great. A poem intrigues him or it doesn't, and that's the end of it. "It's ironic that the professions I've had, teaching and writing criticism, have both put me in the position of stating my opinion about somebody, where in fact I feel that I'm probably not qualified, or I could be making a mistake that would cause somebody unhappiness," he says. "Who am I to say whether it's any good or not?"

When he does write about poetry, he is the gentlest of critics. He lets his eye bump over the surface of a poem, reluctant to disturb its structure. He almost never digs in or selects or rearranges in an effort to wrest a meaning or a narrative from it, and when he does his attempts seem halfhearted, as though he were doing it only because he understands that this is one of the things that a critic is supposed to do. He prefers to suggest a number of possible meanings or reflections with question marks attached, never feeling obliged to settle on one. It isn't that he believes that a poem can mean anything, or means nothing, or that language is irreducibly ambiguous, or that only an excavation of the author's unconscious can provide the key, or that the author's intention is irrelevant, or anything like that. He isn't interested in theory. It's simply that, for him, poems are pleasurable tools. He wants a poem to do something to *him*, to spark a thought or, even better, a verse of his own; he has no urge to do something to the poem.

People often tell him that they never understood his poems, or never understood them so well, until they heard him read them out loud. This puzzles him, because he can't detect any particular quality in his voice or way of speaking that would produce that effect. He guesses that maybe because he is familiar with his poems, when he reads them they sound more like regular talking. It is more likely, though, that a person might understand them better in readings because he is forced to listen to them in real time. He can't go back and try to make sense of this line or that, as he could if he were reading it in a book: if something sounds odd he must simply accept it and continue to listen, letting his mind catch on one phrase or another. And if he finds himself suddenly jolting back to attention after a minute or two of wondering whether he remembered to lock his apartment, or whether a crack in the ceiling looks more like a fried egg or France, or whether he should have a hamburger for dinner, he must accept that he has missed a bit of the poem, there is no retrieving it, and just enjoy what is left without worrying too much about how it all fits together.

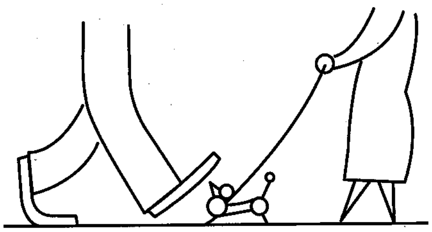
This seemingly unpropitious situation is in fact a rather good one for listening to an Ashbery poem. To Ashbery it is significant that poems are experiences that take place over time, like music—that you can't understand a poem in one outside-of-time instant as you sometimes can a painting. And the distractions of listening to a reading create a kind of in-the-round effect, as he puts it. That was the effect he was trying to achieve in particular when he wrote "Litany," a poem comprising two parallel columns of words that in theory are supposed to be read simultaneously: he wanted to simulate the experience of overhearing two conversations at once, which he finds interesting even though, or because, he cannot properly understand either one. (This experience cannot of course be replicated by reading the transcripts of both conversations, which is perhaps why he considers "Litany" something of a failure, though it works well in performance.)

Ashbery compares his poems to environments, the idea being that an environment is something that you are immersed in but cannot possibly be conscious of the whole of. They are akin in this sense to environmental art, where, as he puts it, "you're surrounded by different elements of a work and it doesn't really matter whether you're focussing on one of them or none of them at any particular moment, but you're getting a kind of indirect refraction from the situation that you're in." Recently he found himself listening, while writing, to a piece by Satie called "Musique d'Ameublement," or "Furniture Music," so called because it was written to be played between acts in a theatre while people weren't really listening but milling around and talking to one another; and it sometimes seems to him that his work is, in that sense, a kind of furniture poetry—that it will be doing its job if its audience is intermittently aware of it while thinking about other things at the same time.

This is not modesty—he doesn't want people not to pay attention. Rather, he's trying to cultivate a different sort of attention: not focussed, straight-ahead scrutiny but something more like a glance out of the corner of your eye that catches something bright and twitching that you then can't identify when you turn to look. This sort of indirect, half-conscious attention is actually harder to summon up on purpose than the usual kind, in the way that free-associating out loud is harder than speaking in an ordinary logical manner. A person reading or hearing his language automatically tries to make sense of it: sense, not sound, is our default setting. Resisting the impulse to make sense, allowing sentences to accumulate into an abstract collage of meaning rather than a story or an argument, requires effort. But that collage—a poem that cannot be paraphrased or explained or "unpacked"—is what Ashbery is after. (When he revises, the words he substitutes are often ones that sound like the ones he's replacing, or feel like them somehow, rather than synonyms. In recent poems, for instance, he has replaced "translucent" with "spiffy," "prisoners" with "pensioners," "unsurprising" with "undetonated," and "Just a little bit longer" with "Just a little critical wondering.")

This is one of the reasons it's a pity that he has a reputation for being a difficult poet: a reader who likes difficult poetry will tend to concentrate fiercely and bring to bear all his most sophisticated analytical equipment in order to wrestle an explicable meaning out of a poem; and while he may well be able to come up with one, it is unlikely to be the sort of meaning that Ashbery was after. Readers who do not like difficult poetry, on the other hand, or who expect poetry to make a certain kind of sense, often become infuriated by what appears to be Ashbery's perverse love of obfuscation for its own sake, or his exasperating refusal simply to say what he means. They suspect him of trickery or humbug. Perhaps for this reason he was ignored early on by many critics (with the notable exception of Harold Bloom).

Lack of recognition is no longer a problem—it hasn't been since his 1975 book "Self-Portrait in a Convex Mirror" won the Pulitzer Prize, the National Book Award, and the National Book Critics Circle Award. (He is actually quite ambivalent about the book's title poem; it didn't come easily, he changed nearly every line in some way or other, and he finds its essayistic structure alien to the rest of his work.) These days, he is considered by many to be the most important living American poet. Indeed, he has become so thoroughly assimilated into the literary canon that one critic who praised his work when it was unfashionable was driven to write an essay denouncing Ashbery arrivistes for "normalizing" his poetry and claiming that it was only modernism all along. He has served a term as New York's State Poet, and recently an excerpt from his poem "The Painter" was selected for a Poetry in Motion subway poster. But his work still makes people angry. The poet John Yau, a former student, once received one of his poems back from a journal with a footprint on the manuscript and a note from the editor explaining that the poem had reminded him of Ashbery, so he had dropped it on the floor and stepped on it.



It's true that verbal abstraction can be jarring and, in a literal sense, repellent, darting about with zigzagging syntax or hurling projectile nouns, but Ashbery's poetry is neither. Its transitions may be confusing but they are rarely abrupt. Its syntax is usually conventional. Its meaning is elusive but only just, like a conversation overheard while half asleep: it is not incantation, not sheer sound, not nonsense, not scat. It has an abstract structure but the smell of a story. He seems not to be smashing up meaning but, rather, to be gently picking up old pieces of meaning that he has found lying about. He embeds images of startling newness in a connective tissue of familiar phrases and warm, nostalgic images (he seems to use the word "sunlight" and its variants more than any other recent poet). If his poems are sometimes dreamlike, they resemble more the fleeting, softly jumbled fantasies of afternoon naps than the surreal otherworld of dreams at night. (He has also always written poems that make sense in the way that ordinary prose does, from "The Instruction Manual," which he wrote in 1955, to "Interesting People of Newfoundland.")

It is not necessarily the case, of course, that Ashbery's poems are best read the way he himself would read them. In fact he rather likes that his poems will be read differently by each reader. He is only mildly irritated when he comes across what he considers to be a particularly obtuse or outlandish interpretation, often one that reaches into a poem and picks out a phrase and worries it, teasing out all sorts of meanings while ignoring the fabric of the whole. Although his poetry is a kind of titration or leaching of the world as it seeps into his mind, it is almost never confessional or personal: since the world seeps into everybody's mind, he believes that his poems depict the privateness of everybody. (He is always describing his own traits as just like everybody else's—a tic of which he is unaware. "Maybe that's wishful thinking," he says, when asked about it.)

It's 1950. More precisely, it is June 27, 1950. It's wiltingly hot out, nearly ninety degrees, and even though it's a Tuesday, Ashbery is lying on the sand at Jones Beach with Kenneth Koch

THRILL OF A ROMANCE

It's different when you have hiccups.
Everything is—so many glad hands competing
for your attention, a scarf, a puff of soot,
or just a blast of silence from a radio.
What is it? That's for you to learn
to your dismay when, at the end of a long queue
in the cafeteria, tray in hand, they tell you the gate closed down
after the Second World War. Syracuse was declared capital
of a nation in malaise, but the directorate
had other, hidden goals. To proclaim logic
a casualty of truth was one.

Everyone's solitude (and resulting promiscuity)
perfumed the byways of villages we had thought civilized.
I saw you waiting for a streetcar and pressed forward.
Alas, you were only a child in armor. Now when ribald toasts
sail round a table too fair laid out—why, the consequences
are only dust, disease and old age. Pleasant memories
are just that. So I channel whatever
into my contingency, a vein of mercury
that keeps breaking out, higher up, more on time
every time. Dirndls spotted with obsolete flowers,
worn in the city again, promote open discussion.

—*John Ashbery*

and Jane Freilicher, two of his closest friends. He is listening to the sound of the sea.

He knows Koch from Harvard—they worked on the literary magazine together. They formed a mutual admiration society of two, an extremely comforting thing to be in, especially when you're in college and starting to write poetry that you aren't sure of. (Later, Ashbery will persuade Koch to like Frank O'Hara's poetry too, and the three of them will hang around together.) He met Jane Freilicher through Koch—he had stayed in his apartment for a while, and when he first arrived Koch had arranged for Freilicher, who lived upstairs, to give Ashbery the key. Koch had a notion that they might become a couple. Ashbery has told him he's gay, but Koch sometimes ignores this. Ashbery is shy and somewhat depressive, so it's good to be friends with a clown like Koch and a charming and preternaturally gregarious person like O'Hara.

He loves living in New York. He's made many friends he likes a lot. He is quite witty (sometimes he prepares his mots beforehand), and they always get his jokes. He goes out all the time, to places like the San Remo and Louis's and the gay bars on Eighth Street. He's discovered a great bookstore called the Periscope that imports books from England that he likes—Henry Green, Ronald Firbank, Ivy Compton-Burnett (he used to think Firbank was frivolous but O'Hara persuaded him that he was worth reading). He's officially in New York because he's getting an M.A. in English at Columbia but he isn't studying very hard. He's written a play—a campy, absurdist, funny play about Greek heroes. He liked writing it—dialogue comes easily to him. He's even acted in a little film. He will soon meet James Schuyler, who will become a very close friend. (Two summers later when they are driving back from the Hamptons, Schuyler will suggest, as a game, that they write a novel together by taking turns writing sentences. They'll keep writing it in dribs and drabs over many years, and eventually, to the amazement of them both, the finished thing—a spoofy farce titled "A Nest of Ninnies"—will actually be published.)

While he is at the beach, someone is listening to the radio and he learns that President Truman has ordered American troops into Korea. He has a habit of thinking about his life in terms of epochs, and he immediately feels that this announcement marks the end of his early insouciant youth. He only just escaped the draft in the last war—this time he may not be so lucky. It's scary to think about—for all he knows he may be forced to leave for the Pacific in a matter of months. And even if he manages to stay out of it, surely this war means that the world is again heading into a dark phase.

He is often gloomy these days, mostly because his poetry hasn't been going well at all. He hasn't been able to write anything he likes for a while now. It's still a year and a half until the John Cage concert that will change everything. He's obsessed with Marianne Moore and Elizabeth Bishop and, to a slightly lesser extent, Auden. He will send what he's written to O'Hara, who tells him that he's going through a necessary phase, an "enriching dry period," which is a nice way to put it but not much consolation. He's young, he knows, but he isn't as young as he once was—he's twenty-two, and sooner or later he's going to have to figure out what to do with himself. What if this block lasts for the rest of his life, and the poems he's written already that he's pretty proud of were just a fluke?

Part of the problem is that half the time he doesn't see the point of continuing to produce the stuff. Who's ever going to read it? Will it ever even be published? His friends think he's a genius but even they don't have any great faith that the world will see things the way they do. When he finishes his M.A. he can probably do something like write jacket copy or press releases for money, assuming that poetry is his real work, but what if he slogs along as a miserable hack in some dreary office and writes poems on the weekends and twenty years from now he's still a peon in a publishing house and it turns out that his poetry isn't any good? Or even if it is good, what if nobody likes it? Is it really worthwhile to embark on this preposterous enterprise of being a poet? ♦

ONWARD AND UPWARD WITH THE ARTS

THE TRANSLATION WARS

How the race to translate Tolstoy and Dostoyevsky continues to spark feuds, end friendships, and create small fortunes.

BY DAVID REMNICK

In the early seventies, two young playwrights, Christopher Durang and Albert Innaurato, collaborated on a satire about nineteenth-century Russian literature called "The Idiots Karamazov." In their liberal interpretation of Dostoyevsky, Father Zosima is a gay foot fetishist. Which causes the angelic monk Alyosha to wonder, "How can there be a God if there are feet?" The main character is based not on any figure in Dostoyevsky but, rather, on his first and most enduring English-language translator, a woman of Victorian energies and Edwardian prose, Mrs. Constance Garnett.

In the first production of "The Idiots Karamazov," at the Yale Repertory Theatre, Garnett was played by a student at the drama school named Meryl Streep, who portrayed the aged "translatrix" as a muddled loon. The mangling of the translator's craft is a main plot point. The Russian for "hysterical homosexual," Mrs. Garnett insists, is "Tchaikovsky." When she recalls for the audience the arduous process of translating "Karamazov," she confuses the four brothers with the "Three Sisters," a stumble that leads inevitably to the musical number "O We Gotta Get to Moscow!" Mrs. Garnett closes the proceedings by reciting a conjugation of the verb "to Karamazov."

Poor Mrs. Garnett! Translators suffer a thankless and uneasy afterlife. (Or they never get that far: until the King James commission, English translators of the Bible were sometimes burned at the stake or strangled—or, as in the case of William York Tyndale, both.) Translators are, for eternity, sent up, put down, nitpicked, and, finally, overturned. The objects of their attentions dread their ministrations. Cervantes complained that reading a translation was "like looking at the Flanders tapestries from behind: you can see the basic shapes but they are so filled with threads that you cannot fathom their original lustre." And yet they persevere: here comes Edith Grossman, four centuries later, quixotically encountering the Don and his Sancho on behalf of a new generation of English readers.

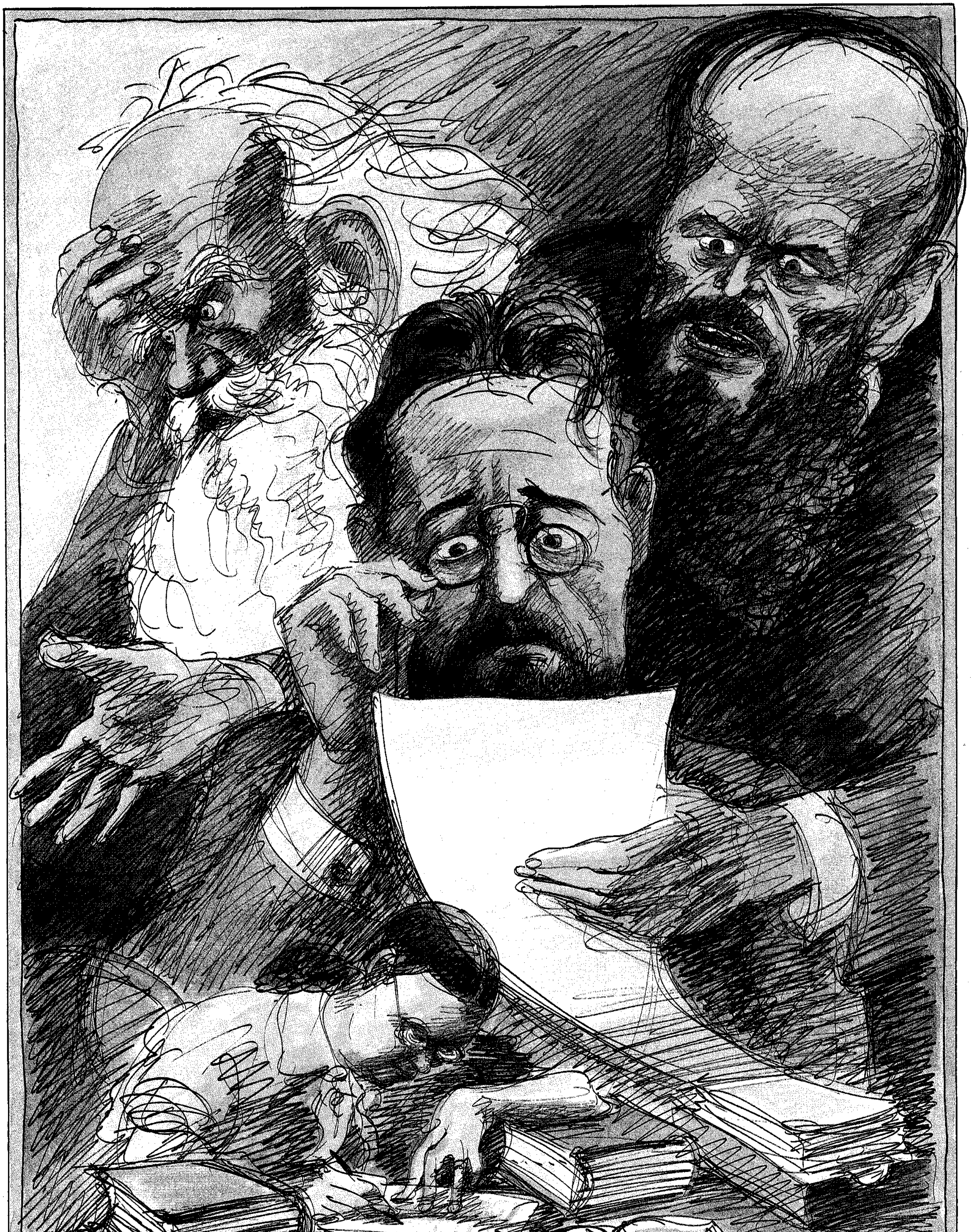
Without translators, we are left adrift on our various linguistic ice floes, only faintly hearing rumors of masterpieces elsewhere at sea. So most English-speaking readers glimpse Homer through the filter of Fitzgerald or Fagles, Dante through Sinclair or Singleton or the Hollanders, Proust through Moncrieff or Davis, García Márquez through Gregory Rabassa—and nearly every Russian through Constance Garnett.

As a literary achievement, Garnett's may have been of the second order, but it was vast. With her pale, watery eyes, her gray hair in a chignon, she was the genteel face of tireless industry. She translated seventy volumes of Russian prose for commercial publication, including all of Dostoyevsky's novels; hundreds of Chekhov's stories and two volumes of his plays; all of Turgenev's principal works and nearly all of Tolstoy's; and selected texts by Herzen, Goncharov, and Ostrovsky. A friend of Garnett's, D. H. Lawrence, was in awe of her matter-of-fact endurance, recalling her "sitting out in the garden turning out reams of her marvelous translations from the Russian. She would finish a page, and throw it off on a pile on the floor without looking up, and start a new page. That pile would be this high—really, almost up to her knees, and all magical."

Without Garnett, the nineteenth-century "Rooshians," as Ezra Pound called them, would not have exerted such a rapid influence on the American literature of the early twentieth. In "A Moveable Feast," Hemingway recounts scouring Sylvia Beach's shelves for the Russians and finding in them a depth and accomplishment he had never known. Before that, he writes, he was told that Katherine Mansfield was "a good short-story writer, even a great short-story writer," but now, after reading Chekhov, she seemed to him like "near-beer." To read the Russians, he said, "was like having a great treasure given to you":

> In Dostoevsky there were things believable and not to be believed, but some so true they changed you as you read them; frailty and madness, wickedness and saintliness, and the insanity of gambling were there to know as you knew the landscape and the roads in Turgenev, and the movement of troops, the terrain and the officers and the men and the fighting in Tolstoy. Tolstoy made the writing of Stephen Crane on the Civil War seem like the brilliant imagining of a sick boy who had never seen war but had only read the battles and chronicles and seen the Brady photographs that I had read and seen at my grandparents' house.

Among the most astringent and authoritative critics of Garnett were Russian exiles, especially Vladimir Nabokov and Joseph Brodsky. Nabokov, the son of a liberal noble who was assassinated at a political conference, left Russia in 1919. He lived in Europe until 1940, when he came to the United States. In "Lectures on Russian Literature," there is a facsimile of the opening pages of his teaching copy of the Garnett "Anna Karenina." On the blank left-hand page, Nabokov has written a quotation from Conrad, who told Garnett's husband, Edward, "Remember me affectionately to your wife, whose translation of Karenina is splendid. Of the thing itself I think but little, so that her merit shines with greater lustre." Angrily, Nabokov scrawls, "I shall never forgive Conrad this crack"—he ranks Tolstoy at the top of all Russian prose writers and "Anna" as his masterpiece—and pronounces Garnett's translation "a complete disaster." Brodsky agreed; he once said, "The reason English-speaking readers can barely tell the difference between Tolstoy and Dostoevsky is that they aren't reading the



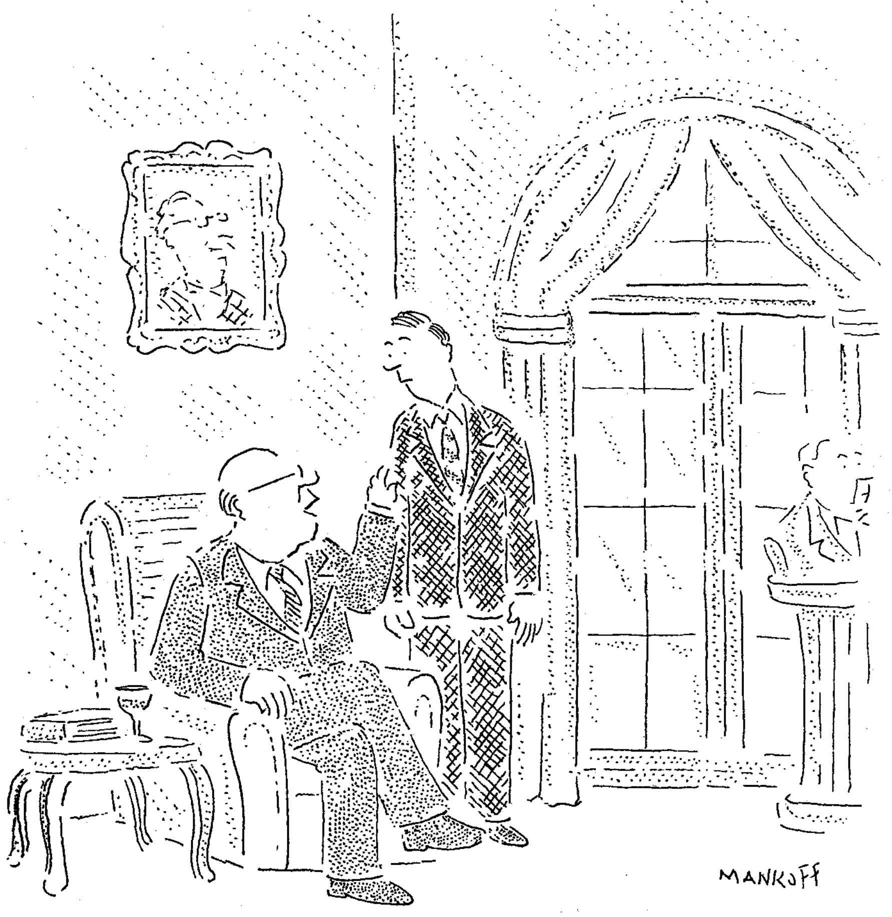
Constance Garnett's versions of the great Russians inspired Hemingway but outraged exiled writers. Illustrations by Edward Sorel.

prose of either one. They're reading Constance Garnett."

Garnett's flaws were not the figment of a native speaker's snobbery. She worked with such speed, with such an eye toward the finish line, that when she came across a word or a phrase that she couldn't make sense of she would skip it and move on. Life is short, "The Idiot" long. Garnett is often wooden in her renderings, sometimes unequal to certain verbal motifs and particularly long and complicated sentences. The typescripts of Nabokov's lectures, which he delivered while teaching undergraduates at Wellesley and Cornell, are full of anti-Garnett vitriol; his margins are a congeries of pencilled exclamations and crabby demurrals on where she had "messed up." For example, where a passage in the Garnett of "Anna" reads, "Holding his head bent down before him," Nabokov triumphantly notes, "Mark that Mrs. Garnett has decapitated the man." When Nabokov was working on a study of Gogol, he complained, "I have lost a week already translating passages I need in 'The Inspector General' as I can do nothing with Constance Garnett's dry shit."

A less imperious but no less discerning critic, Kornei Chukovsky (who was also a famous writer of children's books), esteemed Garnett for her work on Turgenev and Chekhov but not for her Dostoyevsky. The famous style of "convulsions" and "nervous trembling," he wrote, becomes under Garnett's pen "a safe blandscript: not a volcano, but a smooth lawn mowed in the English manner—which is to say a complete distortion of the original."

Garnett (1862-1946) was one of eight children. Her father was paralyzed, and when Constance was just fourteen her mother died of a heart attack from the exertion of hoisting her husband from chair to bed. Constance won a scholarship to read classics at Newnham College, Cambridge, and after graduation she married a publisher, Edward Garnett, the scion of a family of English literary aristocrats.



"Giving something back to the community is a fine idea. Just make sure you take a lot more out first."

When the Garnetts were setting up housekeeping, Edward began to invite various Russian exiles as weekend guests. Constance was entranced by their stories of revolutionary fervor and literary ferment. In 1891, when she was confined with a difficult pregnancy, she began to learn Russian. Soon, she tried her hand at translating minor pieces, beginning with Goncharov's "A Common Story" and Tolstoy's "The Kingdom of God Is Within You" and then moving on to her favorite of the Russians, Turgenev. In 1894, she left behind her infant son and her husband and made a three-month trip to Russia, where she drove long distances through snowstorms by sleigh, visited experimental schools, and dined with Tolstoy at his estate.

When Garnett returned to England, she began an ascetic lifelong routine of housekeeping, child-rearing, and translating. Mornings, she made porridge for her son David, and then, according to her biographer Carolyn Heilbrun, "she would go round the garden, while the dew was still on the plants, to kill the slugs; this was a moment of self-indulgence." Garnett was a sickly woman, suffering from migraines, sciatica, and terrible eyesight, and yet her ailments did not deter her from working as a translator. She turned down an offer from Tolstoy's close friends Louise and Aylmer Maude to collaborate on a translation of "War and Peace" and did it on her own. (So, too, did the Maudes, her only rival in Tolstoy.) Garnett went nearly blind working on "War and Peace." She hired a secretary, who read the Russian text to her aloud; Garnett would dictate back in English, sometimes grabbing away the original text and holding it a few inches from her ailing eyes.

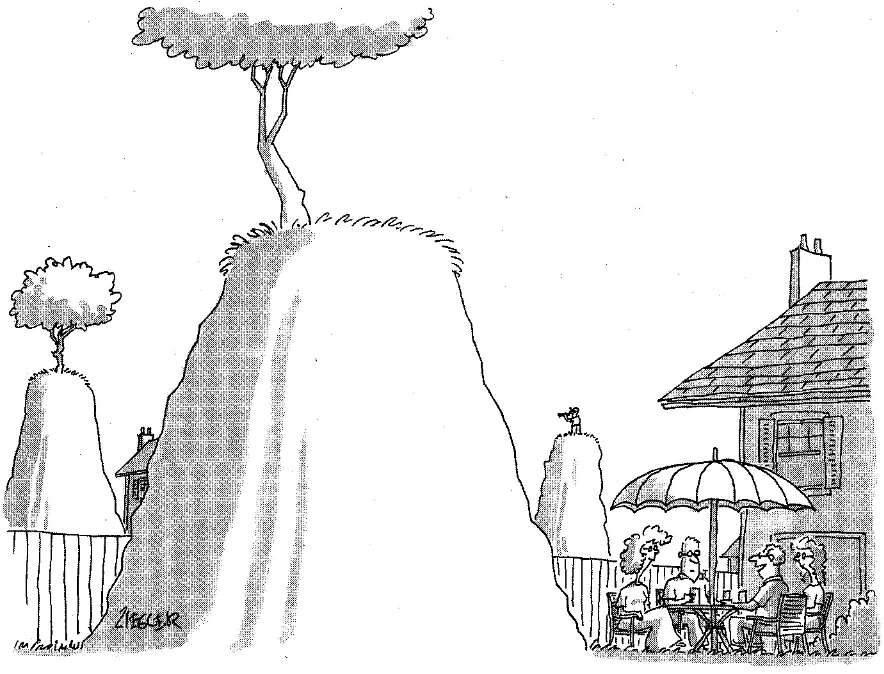
Hemingway recalls telling a friend, a young poet named Evan Shipman, that he could never get through "War and Peace"—not "until I got the Constance Garnett translation." Shipman replied, "They say it can be improved on. I'm sure it can, although I don't know Russian."

Richard Pevear was living in Manhattan in the mid-nineteen-eighties when he began reading "The Brothers Karamazov." He and his wife, a Russian émigrée named Larissa Volokhonsky, had an apartment on the fourth floor of a brownstone on West 107th Street. To earn money, Pevear built custom furniture and cabinets for the emerging executive class in the neighborhood. He had always earned just enough to get by: in New Hampshire, he cut roses in a commercial greenhouse; he worked in a boatyard repairing yachts. He'd published verse in *The Hudson Review* and other quarterlies, and he'd worked on translations from the languages he knew: French, Italian, Spanish. He'd translated poems by Yves Bonnefoy and Apollinaire, and a philosophical work called "The Gods," by Alain, a teacher of Jean-Paul Sartre and Simone Weil.

Larissa was born in Leningrad; her brother Henri is a poet who was a rival of Brodsky. While Larissa was still living in Russia, she learned English, sat in on a translation seminar, and, using a smuggled copy of *The New Yorker*, translated a story by John Updike. After she emigrated, in 1973, she translated "Introduction to Patristic Theology," by John Meyendorff, a Russian Orthodox priest and thinker.

One day, when Richard was reading "Karamazov" (in a translation by one of Garnett's epigones, David Magarshak), Larissa, who had read the book many times in the original, began peeking over her husband's shoulder to read along with him. She was outraged. It's not there! she thought. He doesn't have it! He's an entirely different writer!

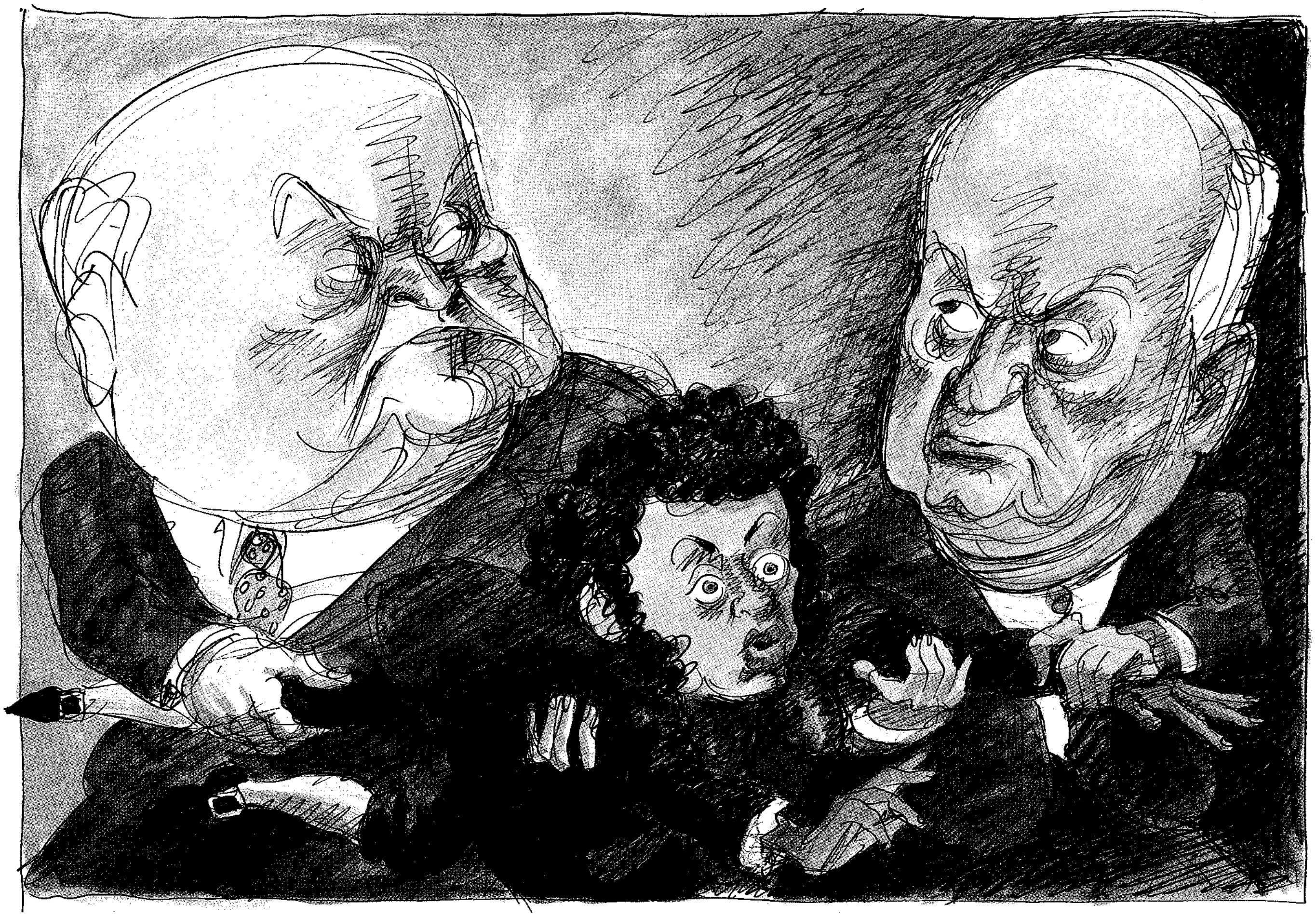
As an experiment, a lark, Pevear and Volokhonsky decided to collaborate on their own "Karamazov." After looking at the various translations—Magarshak, Andrew MacAndrew, and, of course, Constance Garnett—they worked on three sample chapters. Their division of labor was—and remains—nearly absolute: First, Larissa wrote out a kind of hyperaccurate trot of the original, complete with interstitial notes about Dostoyevsky's diction, syntax, and references. Then, Richard, who has never mastered conversational Russian, wrote a smoother, more Englished text, constantly consulting Larissa about the original and the possibilities that it did and did not allow. They went back and forth like this several times, including a final session in which Richard read his English version aloud while Larissa followed along in the Russian. Their hope was to be true to Dostoyevsky, right down to his famous penchant for repetition, seeming sloppiness, and melodrama.



"Here at Hazmat Acres we take pride in our beautiful mystery mounds."

When they had a text they liked, they sent a copy to an editor at Random House. It came back with a brief letter that said, in Richard's reading, "No, thanks. Garnett lives forever. Why do we need a new one?" Then they tried Oxford University Press. The editors there sent the text along to an Oxford don, who objected to Alyosha Karamazov being called an "angel"; in the margin he wrote instead "good chap"; another marginal note said, simply, "balls." Oxford University Press turned them down. They did not despair. Pevear and Volokhonsky had in the meantime armed themselves with enthusiastic letters of endorsement from some of the country's best Slavic scholars—including Victor Terras, at Brown; Robert Louis Jackson, at Yale; Robert Belknap, from Columbia; and Joseph Frank, Dostoyevsky's supreme biographer, from Stanford—and sent the manuscript out to Holt, Harcourt Brace, Farrar, Straus & Giroux, and a couple of others. There was only one bite: Jack Shoemaker, from North Point Press, a small house in San Francisco (now defunct), called, offering an advance of a thousand dollars—roughly a dollar per page. They estimated that the translation would take five to six years—more than twice as long as it took Dostoyevsky to write the novel. Although translators of long-dead authors do not have to share royalties, the arithmetic was unpleasant. Pevear called back and shyly asked if, perhaps, North Point could come up with a bit more money. Shoemaker offered six thousand. "P/V," as they would come to be known in the academic journals, went to work on "The Brothers Karamazov." In time, they would become the best-selling and perhaps the most authoritative translators of Russian prose since Constance Garnett.

A few months ago, I visited Pevear and Volokhonsky in Paris. They moved to France in 1988, convinced that France would be cheaper than the Upper West Side. They live in a small ground-floor apartment on a side street called Villa Poirier. They are both in their early sixties and have two grown children. Pevear is a mild, friendly man with a gray goatee and the sort of untraceable accent that comes off a little high-end. Volokhonsky is earthier, more reserved than her husband, though hardly retiring. Sometimes Pevear would barge uninvited into his wife's sentences, but she did not easily relent. The rooms are spare and light, and reminded me of apartments I had visited in many Russian cities, apartments of a particular intellectual variety, with the entranceway lined with bookshelves and volumes in Russian, English, French, and other languages. Russian intellectuals always seem to display pictures not only of the family but also of their cultural icons; Larissa kept photographs above her desk of John Meyendorff and another venerable Orthodox thinker, Alexander Schmemann.



Edmund Wilson waged a public battle against his friend Vladimir Nabokov's translation of Pushkin's "Eugene Onegin."

Pevear and Volokhonsky made it clear that their work is a collaboration—her Russian, his English—but they work in adjoining offices, alone. "We don't want to work over short passages together," Pevear said. "Larissa does an entire draft first. The first draft for 'The Brothers Karamazov' took two years, and thankfully we had an N.E.H. grant"—for thirty-six thousand dollars—"which we stretched out."

"We thought it would last forever!" Larissa said. "We'd never had anything like that kind of money. We moved to France illegally on a tourist visa, and it was finally a policeman who told us that we needed to 'regularize our situation,' as he put it."

Unlike Garnett, who started small and then worked her way up to the big, baggy monsters of Dostoyevsky and Tolstoy, Pevear and Volokhonsky began with the bulkiest and most complex masterpiece imaginable. "The Brothers Karamazov" is, to use Mikhail Bakhtin's famous term, the most polyphonic of Dostoyevsky's novels, the one with the most voices, tones, and textures braided into the text. Tolstoy and Chekhov are far clearer, more serene; perhaps, among the main nineteenth-century texts, only Gogol's "Dead Souls," with its singular vocabulary and jokes, is as difficult for a translator.

"We thought, if we can do this together, we should start with the book that meant the most to us and had suffered the most from previous translators," Pevear said. "Dostoyevsky's marvellous humor had been lost. The Divine Comedy is divine, a religious work, but it's also funny; there are comic moments. The same with Dostoyevsky, and the comedy comes when you least expect it. Ilyusha is dying. His shoes are outside the room. His father is banging his head against the door. A prestigious German doctor comes from Moscow to treat the boy. The doctor comes out of the room after seeing him and the father asks him if there is any hope. He says, 'Be pre-pared for an-ny-thing.' Then, 'lowering his eyes, he himself prepared to step across the threshold to the carriage.' Dickens would never have joked at such a moment. He would have jerked all the tears he could have from us."

"Yes, that's true," Larissa said. "Translators too often look for the so-called Russian sensibility, and, lo and behold, they find it: the darkness, the obsessiveness, the mystic genius. All of that is there, of course. But there is also a lightness, a joyful Christian lightness, too. There are deaths, suicide, the death of a child, Ivan goes mad, Mitya goes to prison—and yet the book ends with joy."

Dostoyevsky's detractors have faulted him for erratic, even sloppy, prose and what Nabokov, the most famous of the un-fans, calls his "gothic rodomontade." "Dostoyevsky did write in a hurry," Pevear said. "He had terrible deadlines to meet. He wrote 'Crime and Punishment' and 'The Gambler' simultaneously. He knew that if he didn't finish 'The Gambler' on time he would lose the rights to all his future books for the next nine years. That's when he hired his future wife as a stenographer and dictated it to her. Tolstoy was better paid, and he didn't even need the money. And yet Dostoyevsky's roughness, despite the rush and the pressure, was all deliberate. No matter what the deadline, if he didn't like what he had, he would throw it all out and start again. So this so-called clumsiness is seen in his drafts, the way he works on it. It's deliberate. His narrator is not him; it's always a bad provincial writer who has an unpolished quality but is deeply expressive. In the beginning of 'The Brothers Karamazov,' in the note to the reader, there is the passage about 'being at a loss to resolve these questions, I am resolved to leave them without any resolution.' He stumbles. It's all over the place."

"And this is how people speak," Volokhonsky said. "We mix metaphors, we stumble, we make mistakes."

"Other translators smooth it out," Pevear said. "We don't."

In his preface, Pevear points out that the narrative voice in the novel is full of hedged assertions, mixed diction, wandering syntax, weirdly incorrect compound modifiers ("Ivan Fyodorovich was convinced beyond doubt of his complete and extremely ill condition"), "fused" clichés (as when he refers to a monk from Obdorsk as "the distant visitor"—combining "visitor from far away" and "distant land"). In order to re-create some sense of the tone of the original, Pevear and Volokhonsky have to rely on their own literary instincts, but they have also devised a set of guidelines. For instance, they will not use an English word that the Oxford English Dictionary says came into use after the publication of the novel they are translating. In the Sidney Monas "Crime and Punishment," the translator uses "pal" instead of something like "old boy." "We won't do that," Pevear said, making the face of a child who has inadvertently eaten a Brussels sprout.

Also, Volokhonsky said, "Dostoyevsky doesn't use slang, really, though sometimes there is a vulgarism. For example, he uses *profiltrovat'sya*—'to filter through,' say, into a society—or *stushevat'sya*, which Dostoyevsky seems to have invented, meaning 'to efface yourself out.' " There are no real obscenities. In "The Demons," a Holy Fool—a religious idiot savant—curses, but Dostoyevsky uses dashes instead of the word itself. Pevear and Volokhonsky are hardly prudes, but their reading tastes have limits. Even when they desperately needed the money, they refused an offer to translate Victor Erofeyev's fantastically dirty novel, "Russian Beauty." Nor did they find much to admire in a recent scandalous text from Russia, Vladimir Sorokin's "Blue Lard." "It was the only book I ever asked to have removed from my house," Volokhonsky said. "I said, 'Take it back, rid me of its presence. We are not amused.' "

To compare the Garnett and the Pevear-Volokhonsky translations of "The Brothers Karamazov" is to alight on hundreds of subtle differences in tone, word choice, word order, and rhythm.

"These changes seem small, but they are essential. They accumulate," Pevear said. "It's like a musical composition and a musician, an interpretation. If your fingers are too heavy or too light, the piece can be distorted."

"It can also be compared to restoring a painting," Volokhonsky said. "You can't overdo it, but you have to be true to the thing."

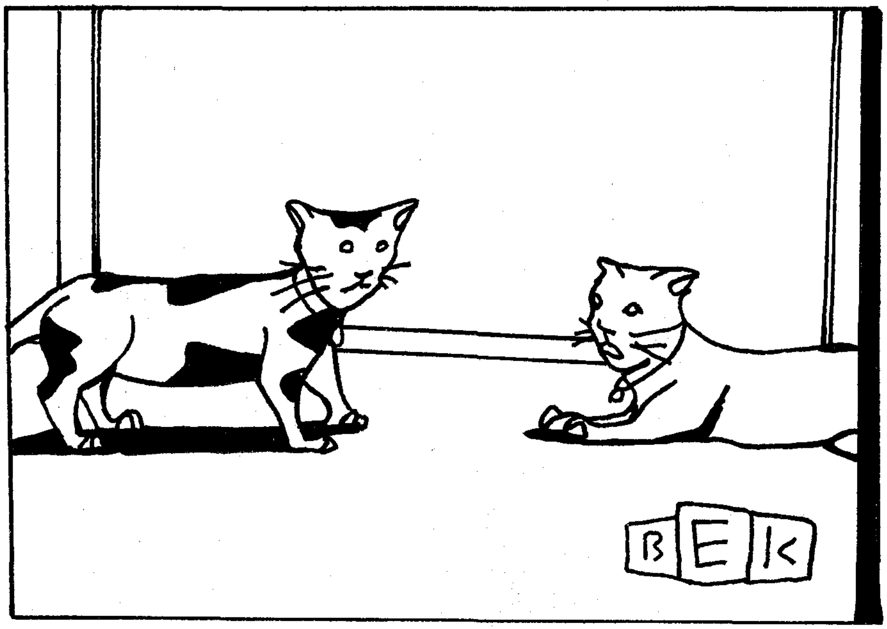
Volokhonsky's sense of fidelity has obvious roots: she is confounded by any translation that has little sense of the original's qualities as they play on a Russian ear and sensibility. Pevear's fidelity to Dostoyevsky's "sloppiness" comes from a rather grand ambition. "I began as a writer, as a poet, not as a translator, so I started out with that set of problems," he said. "It seemed to me that English prose had become textureless, flavorless, flat, naïve, a kind of dull first person. 'I woke up. I saw the window. I felt very bad. The sun was rising over the hills.' Now, Dostoyevsky writes often in the first person, but there's a richness of texture and idea and voice. So one subliminal idea I started out with as a translator was to help energize English itself.

"Hemingway read Garnett's Dostoyevsky and he said it influenced him," he continued. "But Hemingway was just as influenced by Constance Garnett as he was by Fyodor Dostoyevsky. Garnett breaks things into simple sentences, she Hemingwayizes Dostoyevsky, if you see what I mean."

The Pevear-Volokhonsky translation of "The Brothers Karamazov" won almost uniformly positive reviews and the PEN prize for translation. "In the Wichita *Eagle*, we got an amazing full-page review with the headline '"KARAMAZOV" STILL LEADS CREATIVE WAY,'" Pevear said as we broke for lunch one day. "The only problem is that they used a photograph of Tolstoy."

Traditionally, translating was part of a Russian writer's work. Before the nineteenth century, the sum total of great Russian literature—after taking into account a twelfth-century epic, "The Song of Igor's Campaign," a few comic playwrights, and some stars of the Westernizing eighteenth century, such as Derzhavin, Radishchev, and Karamzin—was relatively negligible. The upper, reading classes automatically thought of literature as a European import. Some read the works in translation, others in the original. In "Eugene Onegin," Pushkin provides us with Tatiana Larina's reading list—"From early on she loved romances, / they were her only food"—and it is all foreign: Richardson, Rousseau, Lovelace, Sophie Cottin, Madame de Staël. And in Chapter 2 of Pushkin's story "The Queen of Spades" an old countess calls on a young officer, her grandson:

> "Paul," cried the Countess from behind the screen, "send me some new novel,



"Culturally, I'm a cat."

• •

> only pray not the kind they write nowadays."
>
> "What do you mean, grand'maman?"
>
> "That is, a novel in which the hero strangles neither his father nor his mother, and in which there are no drowned bodies. I have a great horror of them."
>
> "There are no such novels nowadays. Would you like a Russian one?"
>
> "Are there any Russian novels?"

During the Soviet period, citizens were deprived of censored works but could read countless translations: Boris Pasternak's "Hamlet," Vasily Zhukovsky's "Odyssey," Nikolai Gnedich's "Iliad." Pushkin paid epigrammatic tribute to Gnedich:

> Poet Gnedich, renderer of Homer the Blind,
> Was himself one-eyed,
> Likewise, his translation
> Is only half like the original.

As part of the Revolution's project to educate the masses, Maxim Gorky initiated a publishing house in 1918 with the plan of producing at least fifteen hundred volumes of "the most outstanding works of world fiction"; the project came to a halt in 1927, having turned out a hundred and twenty books. As socialist realism was imposed on Soviet writers, one form of permissible resistance, of finding an inner freedom, was to read translations of foreign writers. No private library was complete without Hemingway, Faulkner, London, Fitzgerald, Steinbeck, Salinger—all officially permitted as "progressive writers" exposing the "ulcers of the capitalist world." There were also stodgy classics that had long ago gone out of fashion in the English-speaking world (especially Sir Walter Scott), as well as some minor writers like A. J. Cronin and James Aldridge. It was common, as in the case of Aldridge, for writers to be translated because they were Communists or, at least, sympathizers. Among the essential pillars of culture in the Soviet era was the journal *Innostrannaya Literatura—Foreign Literature*—which published stories and novels in translation.

One of the forbidden lights of Russian literature during the Soviet era was Vladimir Nabokov. None of his books, not the early Russian-language novels written in France and Germany or the later works, written in English when he lived in the United States and Switzerland, were approved by the authorities. He was considered dangerously "anti-Soviet" and banned outright. Even his translation of "Eugene Onegin"—with its three accompanying volumes of commentary (notes so Nabokovian, so joyful, intricate, and erudite, that they seem like the apparatus to one of his novels, like the "commentary" of "Pale Fire")—even this was impossible to find in the pre-Gorbachev Soviet Union except in illegal, smuggled editions.

Pevear and Volokhonsky told me that they considered Nabokov's "Onegin" one of the great triumphs of translation, even though it is nothing like their own work. Nabokov, who regarded "The Gift" and "Lolita" as his best novels, thought that his "Onegin" was perhaps the most important project of his life and, at the same time, like all translation, innately futile. In 1955, just as he was setting out on the project, he published a poem in this magazine on the impossibility, the insult, of translation:

> What is translation? On a platter
> A poet's pale and glaring head,
> A parrot's screech, a monkey's chatter,
> And profanation of the dead.
> The parasites you were so hard on
> Are pardoned if I have your pardon,
> O Pushkin, for my stratagem.
> I travelled down your secret stem,
> And reached the root, and fed upon it;
> Then, in a language newly learned,
> I grew another stalk and turned
> Your stanza, patterned on a sonnet,
> Into my honest roadside prose—
> All thorn, but cousin to your rose.

The poem, which is written in Pushkin's signature stanza form—fourteen lines, a hundred and eighteen syllables in iambic tetrameter, with a regular scheme of feminine and masculine rhymes—is both tribute and apology, to Russian and to Pushkin.

Nabokov worked on "Onegin" for nearly a decade. His intention, as he makes clear in the introduction, is not to provide a traditional "poetic" rendering, a pleasurable English "Onegin," like Avrahm Yarmolinsky's, James Falen's, or Charles Johnston's noble attempts. Such efforts, he felt, had necessarily ended in failure.

Not long before publishing his own "Onegin," Nabokov took to the pages of *The New York Review of Books* and, like the lepidopterist he was, picked the wings off a translation by Walter Arndt—which, to his rage, went on to win the Bollingen Prize. Nabokov could not bear Arndt's "Germanisms," his freewheeling sacrifice of semantic accuracy for rhythmic "beauty." Of all the sins of a translator, he would later write, "The third, and worst, degree of turpitude is reached when a masterpiece is planished and patted into such a shape, vilely beautified in such a fashion as to conform to the notions and prejudices of a given public. This is a crime, to be punished by the stocks as plagiarists were in the shoebuckle days."

For his part, Nabokov intended to provide the reader with a literal-minded "crib, a pony," as he once told an interviewer. "And to the fidelity of transposal I have sacrificed everything: elegance, euphony, clarity, good taste, modern usage, and even grammar." He had no hope for "Onegin" as an English poem. His purpose was singular and clear. Just as Dante wrote the Divine Comedy to move a reader toward Scripture (or so he said), Nabokov wrote his translation to inspire his reader to know the poem in Russian:

> It is hoped that my readers will be moved to learn Pushkin's language and go through EO again without this crib. In art as in science there is no delight without the detail, and it is on details that I have tried to fix the reader's attention. Let me repeat that unless these are thoroughly understood and remembered, all "general ideas" (so easily acquired, so profitably resold) must necessarily remain but worn passports allowing their bearers short cuts from one area of ignorance to another.

Despite the stubbornly eccentric and unlovely texture of Nabokov's "Onegin," the work was generally well reviewed, especially by those who understood and accepted his intention and did not go looking for an English poem. The most notable exception was Edmund Wilson, who decided in July, 1965, to wage battle against the translation in the pages of *The New York Review.*

Since 1940, just after Nabokov's arrival in the United States, Wilson and Nabokov enjoyed a warm friendship, a constant Dear Volodya–Dear Bunny correspondence full of mutual instruction, jocular competition, one-upmanship, and traded enthusiasms. They were well matched: both were self-confident, supremely intelligent, and well trained in the art of polemics. Wilson had been extraordinarily kind to Nabokov, making introductions for him that led to teaching jobs, a Guggenheim fellowship, contracts with book publishers, and publication in *The New Yorker* and *The New Republic.* And yet there was an uncommon, almost frightening honesty in the relationship. Wilson did not hesitate to tell Nabokov that he did not like "Bend Sinister," "Lolita," "Ada," and other major works. (He never bothered to read "The Gift.") Nabokov, despite his debts to Wilson, treated him, especially on Russian matters, with a breezy condescension: "Dear Bunny, I am going to steal an hour from Gogol and thrash out this matter of Russian versification, because you are as wrong as can be." Wilson was bemused by many of Nabokov's literary judgments, his disdain for Mann's "asinine" "Death in Venice," Pasternak's "vilely written" "Dr. Zhivago," Faulkner's "corncobby chronicles"—anything that smacked of journalese, local color, big ideas, or political propaganda. And yet, for a quarter century, despite any friction or jealousies, the friendship seemed to thrive on its directness. "I like you very much," Nabokov told Wilson in 1945, to which Wilson replied, "Our conversations have been among the few consolations of my literary life through these last years—when my old friends have been dying, petering out or getting more and more neurotic." In the end, however, the relationship could not survive Wilson's attack on Nabokov's "Onegin." The assault was too fierce, too presumptuous, and Nabokov's amour propre was never quite restored.

Despite his imperfect, book-learned Russian, Wilson betrayed no doubt that he was capable of taking on Nabokov. In the course of his career, he learned several languages in order to "work up" his projects: Russian and German to write on Marx and Lenin in "To the Finland Station," Hebrew for "The Dead Sea Scrolls," Hungarian to read Endre Ady and other poets. He was especially earnest about his Russian, consulting grammars, Dahl's dictionary (a more antiquarian sort of Russian O.E.D.), and, quite often, his émigré friend.

When it came to Russian literature, the correspondence between Nabokov and Wilson was rather like that between an amused, patient teacher and an eager, overreaching student. Wilson's publication of "The Strange Case of Pushkin and Nabokov," in *The New York Review of Books*, was an assault from the back of the class:

> This production, though in certain ways valuable, is something of a disappointment; and the reviewer, though a personal friend of Mr. Nabokov—for whom he feels a warm affection sometimes chilled by exasperation—and an admirer of much of his work, does not propose to mask his disappointment. Since Mr. Nabokov is in the habit of introducing any job of this kind which he undertakes by an announcement that he is unique and incomparable and that everybody else who has attempted it is an oaf and an ignoramus, incompetent as a linguist and scholar, usually with the implication that he is also a low-class person and a ridiculous personality, Nabokov ought not to complain

"Write what you know. Write about male-pattern baldness."

> if the reviewer, though trying not to imitate his bad literary manners, does not hesitate to underline his weaknesses.

Wilson not only disapproved of Nabokov's "bald and awkward language"; he also discerned in his friend a desire to "torture both the reader and himself" by "flattening out" Pushkin. In "The Wound and the Bow," Wilson found the key to imaginative art in the injuries and humiliations suffered by a writer in his youth—in Nabokov's case, the humiliation of being stripped of his homeland, of being forced to wander the world far from his home and his language. Nabokov's revenge, he feels, is "sado-masochistic," and it expresses itself in an infuriating perversion of Pushkin:

> Aside from this desire to suffer and make suffer—so important an element in his fiction—the only characteristic Nabokov trait that one recognizes in this uneven and sometimes banal translation is the addiction to rare and unfamiliar words, which, in view of his declared intention to stick so close to the text that his version may be used as a trot, are entirely inappropriate here. . . . He gives us, for example, *rememorating*, *producement*, *curvate*, *habitude*, *rummers*, *familistic*, *gloam*, *dit*, *shippon* and *scrab*.

In all, Wilson accused Nabokov of "actual errors in English," an "unnecessarily clumsy style," "vulgar" phrases, immodesty, inaccurate transliteration, a "lack of common sense," a "tedious and interminable appendix," a poor grasp of Russian prosody, an "overdone" commentary that suffers from "information which is generally quite useless," and—"to try to get all my negatives out of the way"—"serious failures" of interpretation. The particulars take up the bulk of Wilson's attack, though he closes with some lapidary tribute to Nabokov's mini-essays on Pushkin's period, cohort, and influences.

After reading Wilson's piece at home in Montreux, Nabokov cabled the coeditor of the *Review*, Barbara Epstein, in New York: "Please reserve space in next issue for my thunder." If Wilson saw his essay as simply an elaboration of an ongoing game, his target did not. Nabokov, whose sense of humor was so supreme on the page, was not at all amused, and his counterattacks, published in *Encounter* and *The New York Review*, filleted Wilson personally as well as in the philological particulars:

> As Mr. Wilson so justly proclaims in the beginning of "The Strange Case of Pushkin and Nabokov," we are indeed old friends. I fully share "the warm affection sometimes chilled by exasperation" that he says he feels for me. In the 1940s, during my first decade in America, he was most kind to me in various matters, not necessarily pertaining to his profession. I have always been grateful to him for the tact he showed in refraining from reviewing any of my novels. We have had many exhilarating talks, have exchanged many frank letters. A patient confidant of his long and hopeless infatuation with the Russian language, I have always done my best to explain to him his mistakes of pronunciation, grammar, and interpretation. As late as 1957, at one of our last meetings, we both realized with amused dismay that despite my frequent comments on Russian prosody, he still could not scan Russian verse. Upon being challenged to read *Eugene Onegin* aloud, he started to do this with great gusto, garbling every second word and turning Pushkin's iambic line into a kind of spastic anapest with a lot of jaw-twisting haws and rather endearing little barks that utterly jumbled the rhythm and soon had us both in stitches.

Like an admiral commanding a flotilla that his underfunded opponent cannot hope to match, Nabokov lords his superior command of Russian language and prosody over his opponent. After a while, his methodical counterattack seems unfair:

> In translating *slushat' shum morskoy* (Eight:IV:11) I chose the archaic and poetic transitive turn "to listen the sound of the sea" because the relevant passage has in Pushkin a stylized archaic tone. Mr. Wilson may not care for this turn—I do not much care for it either—but it is silly of him to assume that I lapsed into a naïve Russianism not being really aware that, as he tells me, "in English you have to listen *to* something." First, it is Mr. Wilson who is not aware that there exists an analogous construction in Russian, *prislushivat'sya k zvuku*, "to listen close to the sound"—which, of course, makes nonsense of the exclusive Russianism imagined by him, and secondly, had he happened to leaf through a certain canto of *Don Juan*, written in the year Pushkin was beginning his poem, or a certain Ode to Memory, written when Pushkin's poem was being finished, my learned friend would have concluded that Byron ("Listening debates not very wise or witty") and Tennyson ("Listening the lordly music") must have had quite as much Russian blood as Pushkin and I.

Wilson never relented in his argument that Nabokov's translation was nearly unreadable as a poem (and here he was right), but, with time, he seemed to regret the affair. On rereading his original article, Wilson admitted that he had sounded "more damaging" than he had intended. But it was too late. The correspondence with Nabokov, once so robust and warm, now dwindled and ceased. Wilson felt the loss acutely. There were a few last desultory letters in the years left to them, but Nabokov could never fully forgive the "Onegin" affair and other slights, including a wounding passage about his wife, Véra, in Wilson's memoir "Upstate." A quarter century of intense friendship ended. In a letter to the *Times Book Review* in November, 1971, Nabokov wrote, "I am aware that my former friend is in poor health but in the struggle between the dictates of compassion and those of personal honor the latter wins." Wilson died in June, 1972.

Pevear and Volokhonsky may be the premier Russian-to-English translators of the era. They are certainly the most versatile and industrious and the only such team in which one member, Richard Pevear, does not really speak the language. Pevear told me that he has not even spent much time in Russia—just one three-week trip to St. Petersburg to meet his wife's old friends and family.

"I've never been curious to see Russia," he said during one of our conversations in Paris. "I'm not curious to see the city of Moscow. Should I be?"

Larissa looked faintly embarrassed by her husband's incuriosity. "I don't know what to say."

By listening to Larissa talk with her émigré friends in Paris, by reviewing thousands of small matters of translation, Pevear has certainly picked up a great deal of Russian, but not its outlandishly rich vocabulary, the complicated grammar, with its maddening various verb conjugations, shades of tense, reflexivities, cases, endings, gerundial gymnastics.

Parenthetically, it's impossible for me not to sympathize with him. Russian was the bane of my academic life. I've never given a subject more time and concentration only to feel broken before the task. In college, to the dismay of the two émigrée dominatrixes who were my teachers, I spent hundreds of hours poring over a brown-and-blue text called Stillman and Harkins (and, later, a more advanced green one by Charles E. Townsend), hundreds more hours in language laboratories mispronouncing verbs, and all to very little avail—so little that I dropped out of school for a year and, upon return, shifted to the sunny promise and mathematical logic of French. Later, I resumed my Russian studies with a young tutor from Novosibirsk, who, upon hearing me attempt a participial phrase with a reflexive, heavily prefixed verb of motion in the anchor position—a maneuver that I considered the triple salchow of my conversational repertoire—winced, as if stabbed, rolled her eyes into the back of her skull, and, upon recovery, seemed eager to return to the communal apartment she had shared in central Siberia. She produced a blue text called "Russky Yazyk dlya Vsyekh"—"Russian for Everybody"—a beginning grammar published in Moscow, and said, "So, we start from page one, yes?"

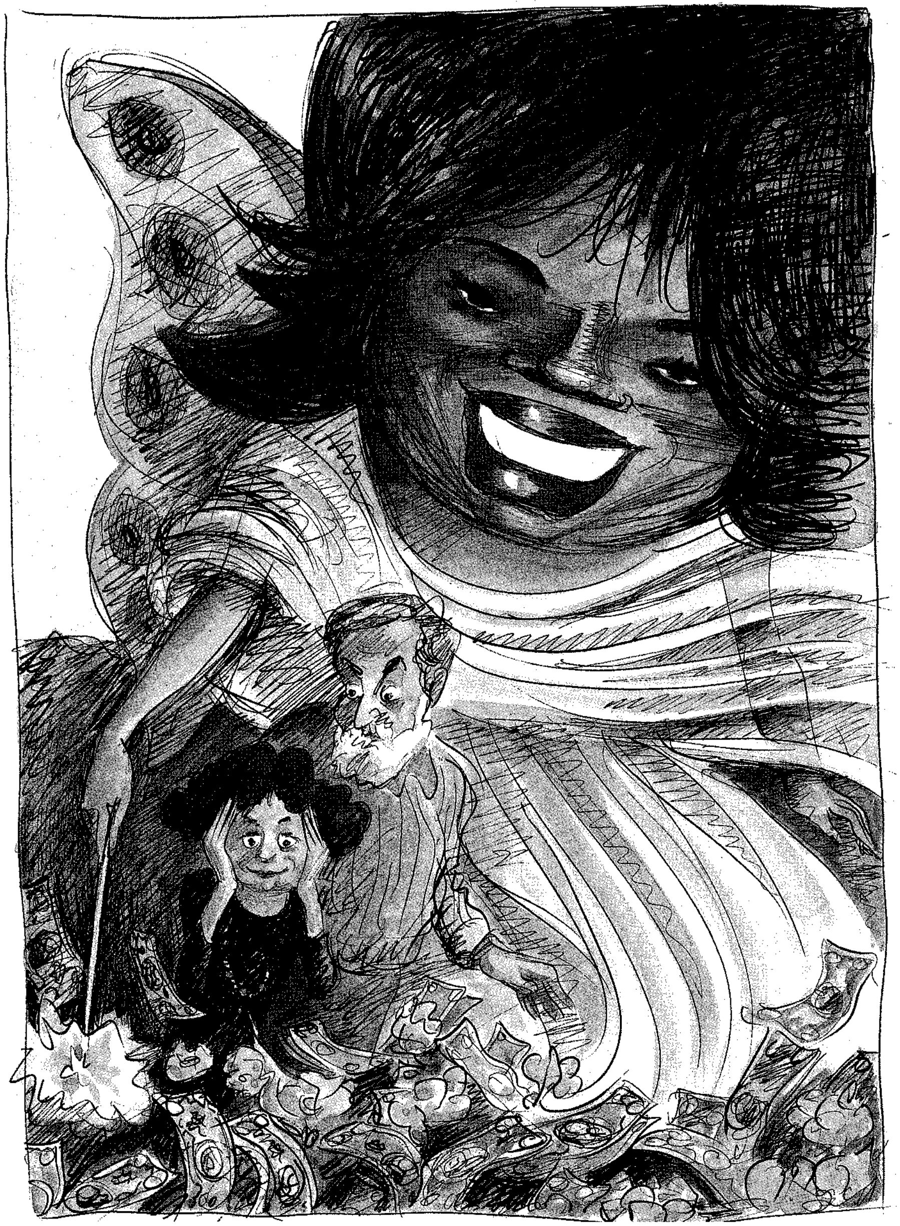
As a teacher, Nabokov revelled in the difficulties of the language almost to the point of serene confidence that no student would ever quite surpass what he called the *Kak-vy-pozhivaetye-ya-pozhivayu-khorosho* (How-are-you-I-am-fine) level of Russian. Nabokov was especially focussed on pronunciation. "Please take out your mirrors, girls," the future author of "Lolita" instructed his students at Wellesley, "and see what happens inside your mouths." Many of his students went into his courses hoping to read Tolstoy in the original (as I did) and left satisfied if they could mutter a simple "These boys are standing on those bridges."

Larissa Volokhonsky is a less imperious professor to her husband than Nabokov ever was to the women of Wellesley. Her drafts and proofs provide literal renderings of the original and plenty of signposts, but the final authority is his. "In English I make mistakes," she said, "but there is enough to explain to Richard what is going on in the Russian text and to collaborate."

Since the great success of "The Brothers Karamazov," Pevear and Volokhonsky have translated (for a variety of publishers) all of the major Dostoyevsky novels and many of his stories; Mikhail Bulgakov's "The Master and Margarita"; a selection of Chekhov's short stories and one of his short novels; and, most famously, Tolstoy's "Anna Karenina."

Strangely, Pevear spoke readily, and with confidence, about Tolstoy's language. He said that the hardest part of starting a long project like "Anna Karenina" was "getting the voice," capturing the narrative tone that will run throughout the book. "Tolstoy's style is the least interesting thing about him, though it is very peculiar," he said. "It seems like most, translators included, are insensible to the crudeness of Tolstoy's style, but Tolstoy liked to be crude, he was crude provocatively. 'Anna Karenina' is interesting very often for how the prose is deliberately not smooth or fine. Nabokov apologizes for Tolstoy's bad writing. But Tolstoy himself said the point is to get the thing said and then, if he wasn't sure he had said it, he would say it again and again."

Pevear and Volokhonsky agree with the majority of their critics that they are best at Dostoyevsky and, perhaps, Tolstoy. Gogol is notoriously difficult for everyone, Chekhov deceptively simple.



Larissa Volokhonsky and Richard Pevear had no idea who Oprah Winfrey was.

"Chekhov has his own difficulties," Larissa said. "His tone seems to be very simple and ordinary, almost banal, and yet it is very hard to catch. It almost falls into trivia, near-cliché."

Richard interrupted, saying, "Yeah, there is a weary rhythm. 'And they saw . . . And then they could see . . . And if it was clear they could move on . . .' One thing after another, without any evident passion, a monotony. Look at 'The Steppe' "—one of Chekhov's best-known longer stories. "The rhythms and paragraphs are on the same level all the time. The task is to maintain that level without falling into banality. Remember, this is the author of 'A Boring Story.' He takes banal people and puts them into banal situations, but he has hope for them. As a doctor, he knew that life is horrible, and if we all knew that, we would hang ourselves. And yet there is a hidden source of light in his work; the source is unknown and unclear. He talks of the horror of life in 'In the Ravine.' And yet there is radiance somewhere in the corner. Dostoyevsky was a Christian and so there is a transcendent clear light. With Chekhov, the light is milder, but it is there."

Pevear and Volokhonsky finished "Anna Karenina" in September, 1998—or so they thought. Despite their growing reputation in the United States, they failed to impress the editors at Penguin in London. "They told us the book was unreadable," Pevear said. "They told us it had to be more 'reader-friendly.' But Tolstoy himself is not reader-friendly! They said it was not at a stage to be copy-edited."

Pevear thought that he had solved the problem by taking out some of Tolstoy's more repetitive or overemphatic passages. "Then we got a persnickety copy editor who kept telling us that things might read obscene in a way we hadn't intended," he said. "For example, Kitty says, 'I love balls.' This editor was good enough to tell us that this might read funny. But Kitty liked going to balls! What were we supposed to do? And one sentence read, 'Did you come recently?' Oh, it was all pretty painful. And then they started blue-pencilling in alternate translations from Rosemary Edmonds, dozens and dozens of times. I was out of my mind with rage. There were more than a hundred cases of that. It took me two weeks, working twelve-hour days, to restore everything."

Finally, in 2000, the book was published in the U.K. Penguin sold a few hundred copies in England. At Viking-Penguin in New York, Caroline White, a senior editor, ordered a print run of thirty-two thousand, with the hope that some strong reviews would mean that the new edition would displace Garnett, the Maudes, and other translations on the academic market.

"He's deliciously old school."

Then, one day in the spring of 2004, White called Pevear in Paris. She had big news. Oprah Winfrey was selecting "Anna Karenina" for her book club. Neither Pevear nor Volokhonsky quite understood the commercial implications. In fact, they had no idea who Oprah Winfrey was. "I thought she was a country singer," Richard said.

White informed them that Viking-Penguin would print an additional eight hundred thousand copies of their translation in a single month. Soon the buses, subways, and coffee shops of America were filled with people reading Tolstoy. I asked Richard and Larissa what "the Oprah moment" meant for them.

"It means I have an accountant," Richard said.

"Notes from Underground" now sells eight thousand copies a year, "Crime and Punishment" twelve thousand, "The Brothers Karamazov" fourteen thousand, "Anna Karenina" twenty thousand. Flush, though not rich, Pevear and Volokhonsky split their time between the apartment in Paris and a farmhouse in Burgundy. They have been thinking about future projects, including the stories of Nikolai Leskov, famous for "Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District." But they cannot look too far ahead, because the publisher Everyman has engaged them to translate the novel that E. M. Forster insisted was the greatest of all, and that is certainly the longest volume in the nineteenth-century lineup: "War and Peace." Volokhonsky is about two-thirds of the way through with her first draft, and Pevear about six hundred pages into his.

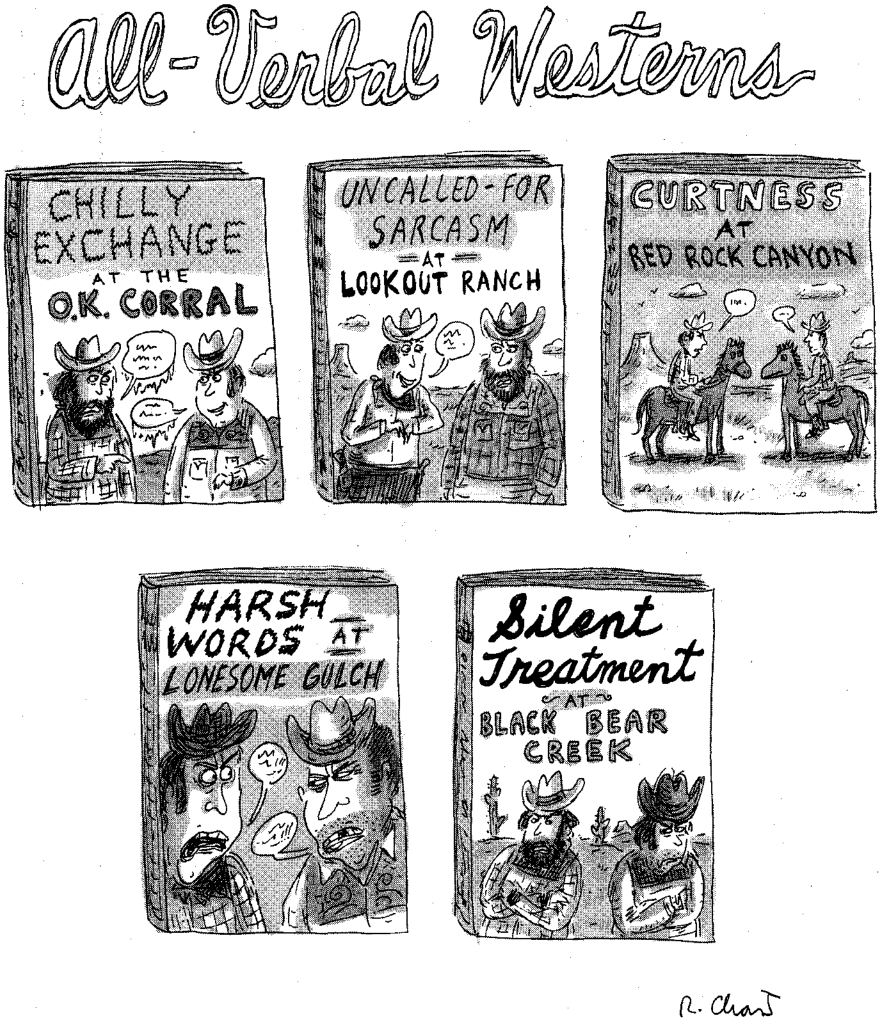
"There is a real challenge in 'War and Peace,' a vast amount of historical detail," he said. "The novel has five hundred historical figures and fictional figures, so we have to write commentaries for the historical ones, which are the vast majority. In the battle scenes, we have to come up with the words for particular kinds of guns and cannons, for military tactics. There is a huge hunting scene, so we have to find very particular words for the wolves, the foxes, the kinds of dogs, the horses, the color of the horses, their gaits, the shape of their paws and hooves and the way they wagged their tails. Tolstoy knew all this as second nature. Or the terms of fashion and high society. In the opening scene, the aunt, *ma tante,* is dressed in ‘high ribbons.’ Elena Kuryagina is dressed in *listya i mokh*—‘leaves and moss.’ What do we do with that? We’ll have to call our friend Sasha Vasiliev, a stage designer, who has a collection of old stage costumes.”

Their deadline is at the end of 2006. Although they prefer Dostoyevsky to Tolstoy, they are finding “War and Peace” to be immensely satisfying. “Even when people go to war, with tragedy and grief, there is still a safe and harmonic world,” Larissa said. “Natasha has babies while living in a world that might not be there tomorrow.”

Pevear, especially, has read some of the theory about translation: Walter Benjamin, José Ortega y Gasset, Roman Jakobson, and, of course, Nabokov. He said that he takes the most inspiration from a turn-of-the-century French poet and translator named Valéry Larbaud. At the end of our last conversation in Paris, Pevear went to his shelves and pulled down a volume in French, and read a prayer by Larbaud addressed to St. Jerome, who translated the Bible into Latin. Following the line with his finger, Pevear squinted and, slowly, translated: “Excellent Doctor, Light of the Holy Church, Blessed Jerome. I am about to undertake a task full of difficulties, and from this moment on I beg of you to help me with your prayers so I can translate this work into French with the same spirit with which it was composed.”

Pevear snapped the book shut and picked up the Maude translation of “War and Peace,” which he’d been reviewing for his own work.

“I know how he feels,” he said. “It’s the same thing that sits on our heads when we start up.”


All-Verbal Westerns
CHILLY EXCHANGE AT THE O.K. CORRAL
UNCALLED-FOR SARCASM AT LOOKOUT RANCH
CURTNESS AT RED ROCK CANYON
HARSH WORDS AT LONESOME GULCH
Silent Treatment AT BLACK BEAR CREEK
R. Chast

Early this fall, Penguin announced the publication of a new translation of “War and Peace”—it was by Anthony Briggs, a British academic. Briggs, who won generally positive reviews, sounded like an attractively modest sort. One of the British papers, the *Daily Telegraph*, quoted him as saying, “Professional translators are generally mediocre people like me, not great poetic geniuses.” The *Times Literary Supplement* published a short, curious article pointing out that Briggs had, unlike some of his predecessors, rendered all Tolstoy’s French into English and even spelled out some of General Kutuzov’s obscenities. (Tolstoy had obscured the profanity with ellipses.) What Rosemary Edmonds, the last translator of the novel, had as “It serves them right, the b—— b——s!” Briggs has as “They asked for it, the fucking bastards!”

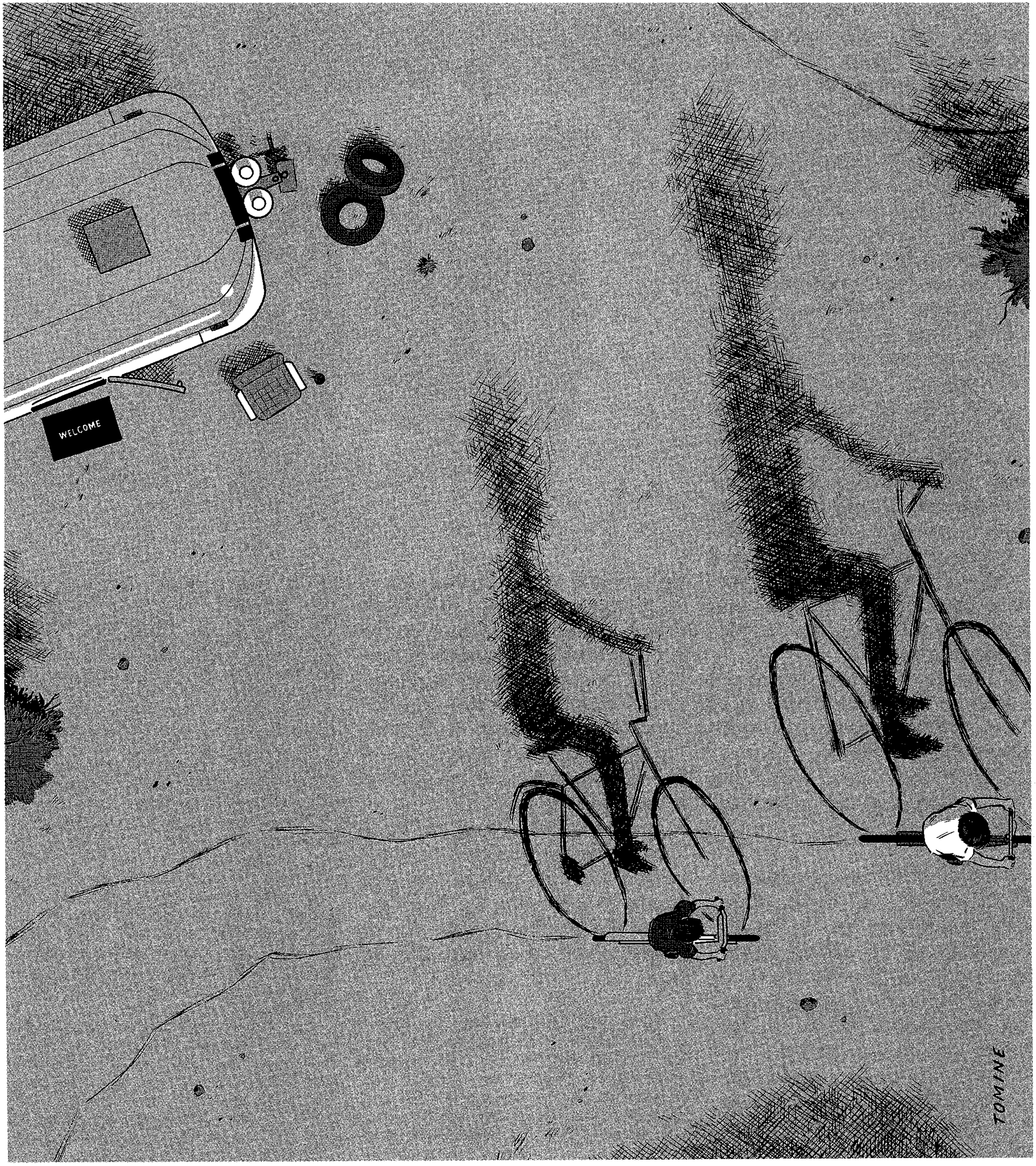
In the meantime, Pevear and Volokhonsky were working on their translation at their farmhouse in Burgundy. I wrote to them about the Briggs approach and hoped for a response, even a prickly one. It came a couple of weeks later:

> We’re well and had a busy but fruitful summer. I’m about to lose the battle of Austerlitz (W&P vol 1 pt 3). . . . About your questions: I don’t know how “new” it is to translate the French passages in “War and Peace.” Edmonds keeps only the “*Eh bien, mon prince*” of the opening speech, but puts the rest in English, whereas Tolstoy has the first ten lines in French, along with many other extended dialogues in the opening chapters. There are also French words and phrases all through the novel. The Maude and Garnett versions translate all of it into English, as they do, for instance, Napoleon’s letter to Murat, and the German of Weyrother’s disposition before Austerlitz. If, as you say, Anthony Briggs also translates it all, then as far as I know ours will be the only version that DOESN’T. We do as Tolstoy does, and, like the Russian editions of the novel, put the translations in the footnotes.
>
> Tolstoy used French for a reason, or for several reasons: to give the tone of the period; to play on the ironies of a French-speaking Russian aristocracy suddenly finding itself thrown into war with France; to suggest a certain frivolity and uprootedness in characters like Prince Vassily and the witty Bilibin. . . . Interestingly, when Napoleon banters with his troops, he does so in French, but when he talks seriously, Tolstoy lends him Russian.
>
> About Kutuzov’s purple patch, again we’ll do as Tolstoy did. He would never have written out “fucking bastards,” and in any case Briggs has not been very inventive. None of us can figure out what epithet Tolstoy had in mind for Kutuzov, but it seems to have involved the mistreatment of mothers.
>
> With best wishes from us both . . . ♦

FICTION

THE GOD OF WAR

BY MARISA SILVER


WELCOME
TOMINE

Ares couldn't help himself. He'd be standing in the circle, waiting for big Ernesto and the opposing oversized twelve-year-old center to fight it out for the jump ball, and he'd find himself yelling, "Irritation!" or "Horrible lack of judgment!," and the boy's hand would reach into the air a millisecond too late, by which time Ernesto would have slapped the ball halfway down the court with his big paw. Or, when the teams were lined up for a free throw, Ares would repeat the word "shame" in a low hiss until it sounded as though the nearby Salton Sea had broken its bounds and was roaring beneath the basketball court.

After a game during which Ares had flustered another player by screaming "Nightmarish thoughts!" just as the boy was about to dunk the ball and pull his team to a two-point lead, Coach Ortega called him in for a man-to-man sit-down talk. It wasn't the kind of talk that Ares had seen in after-school movies on TV, the kind where the coach turns a messed-up kid's life around with one meaningful sentence and a slightly too hard chuck on the shoulder.

"What the hell are you saying out there? What the hell is *wrong* with you?" Ortega said, and Ares got the feeling that if he had just yelled something about somebody's mother eating worms he wouldn't be sitting in the locker room after everyone else had gone home. But then his coach launched into something about respect and sportsmanship and how he had given Ares a chance on the team even though Ares wasn't particularly good at basketball and how Ares had let him down. How it wasn't just Ares who had to be embarrassed—Ortega had to be embarrassed as well, because of *his* horrible lack of judgment.

Ares felt the truth of the words like a river of warm shame coursing through his chest. It was a good feeling. Shame was as familiar and comforting as the pillow on his bed, which was emaciated and full of years of his own smell, and which he could not sleep without.

"Just cut it out, baby," Laurel said gently that night, after Ares had told her about the coach's talk. He had a habit of telling his mother all the bad things he did. He was like a dog in this way, showing up at the door with a half-chewed rat in its mouth, asking for approval. "You know what's right."

"O.K.," Ares said, deflated. Something about his mother's care seemed uncaring. There was too much acceptance in it, a disarming lack of judgment. She was stuffing a raw chicken with lemon halves and rubbing oil on its pimpled skin. Ares watched her hands. They were big, strong, and bumpy with knuckles. They spent their days rubbing and kneading the backs of her massage clients at a spa in Palm Desert. He couldn't imagine touching all those strangers, patting and slapping them like the chicken she was handling now.

He waited for her to say something more, but her head was tilted to the side as she focussed on the back of a box of couscous. Her reddish hair covered her face. When she tried to pour the grains into a measuring cup, pellets flew across the countertop and onto the floor.

Malcolm let out his weird backward laugh, making the sound on the inhale, so that a stranger might have thought he was choking. He was five and did not talk. Or, as Laurel liked to say, he "chose silence." He also chose to organize all the videos according to which movie studio made them, and to pile up books in order of size, largest to smallest, then stack them around the main room of the trailer: literary pyramids. Instead of putting the books back on the black metal shelves she had found in a Dumpster a year earlier, Laurel simply used the structures as footstools or side tables for her smelly massage creams and clove-cigarette butts. Ares didn't know if she left the piles in place as a gesture of support for Malcolm or because she was the kind of person who didn't kill ants, even when they marched brazenly across the kitchen counter.

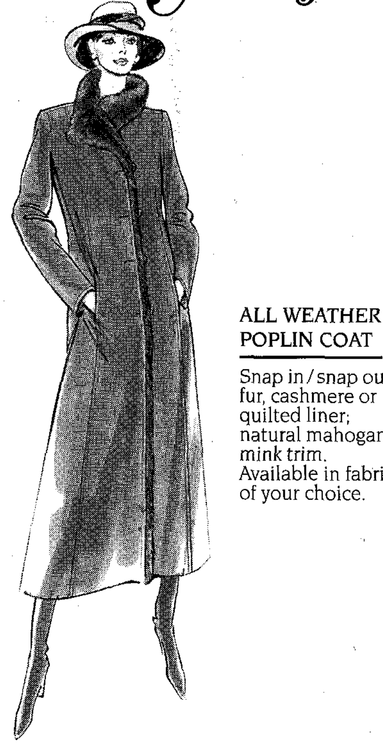
Malcolm's life was a head-bent, shoulders-hunched sidelong glance at the world. The only people he looked in the eye were Ares and Laurel. When Laurel wasn't around, Ares sometimes showed Malcolm a treasure—half a Mars bar he'd saved from lunch, or a dollar bill—waving it before his brother's eyes, then quickly hiding it somewhere in the trailer. Malcolm would search frantically while Ares watched, hoping that frustration and desire would compel words out of his brother's mouth. But Malcolm eventually lost interest in the treasure hunts, or he forgot what he'd been looking for in the first place.

The school had recommended that Malcolm be evaluated by a specialist. The district was obliged to offer the tests to learning-disabled kids. But Laurel had declined. She didn't want Malcolm to be labelled. "Labels are for boxes," she said. "So you never have to look inside them. You just say, 'Oh, I don't need any more of *that*.'" She wrinkled her nose and waved her hand dismissively, as though whatever *that* was had a terrible odor. "He'll talk when he has something to say," she said sometimes, as if Malcolm's critical faculties were so sophisticated that by the age of five he had judged the world and found it unworthy of his participation. That he had missed several developmental milestones on his way to being the obtuse, angular kid he was didn't seem to worry her. Or maybe it did worry her. This was the difficult place Ares lived in: the space between Laurel's seeming lack of concern, which felt somehow effortful, and his absolute conviction that she blamed everything on him.

"Typical," she'd say, mimicking the politically correct lingo for normal kids that Malcolm's special-ed teacher used. "As if being typical were something to strive for." She liked to hold Malcolm on her lap and stroke the place on the top of his head where he'd fallen. She'd circle the spot until Malcolm's hair became twisted around her finger. Then she'd extract her hand from the tangle and start over again. Watching her, Ares would become unbearably tense, convinced that one of these days she would come out and say what they were both thinking, what they had both been thinking nonstop for nearly five years. He waited for that moment with the kind of anticipation he felt on the slow ascent to the top of a roller coaster—knowing that what happened on the other side would be both painful and exhilarating, rich with the possibility of utter annihilation.

Two days after the "nightmarish thoughts" incident, Ares took Malcolm out of class early so that the two of them could ride their bikes to the clinic for a dentist's appointment. The other kids at school cut a wide swath around Room 23, the "'tard room," as if some force inside might reach out and grab

ADRIAN TOMINE



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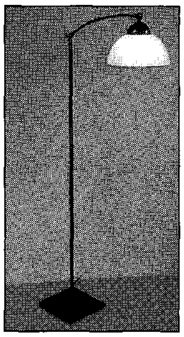

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them and suck out their otherwise normal brains. Some of the boys made gooney sounds if they heard laughter coming from behind the always closed door, and Ares had more than once heard his brother referred to as a "freak." He never defended Malcolm—a worse betrayal, he knew, than what he'd done to his brother in the first place.

When he opened the door, the room felt strange. It was too warm, for one thing, and slightly muzzy; Ares felt as if he were looking through a camera lens that had not been adjusted to focus. A boy in a motorized wheelchair hung his head down over his desk in a way that did not resemble either concentration or sleep. In one corner, a teacher led a group of kids in a song that sounded like "Yesterday," except that the words and the tune were stretched out like Play-Doh, and Ares couldn't be sure. Malcolm sat at a desk counting paper clips and putting them into piles of twenty.

"He's smarter than those other kids," Ares told his mother that night, after the dentist's appointment. "He's not learning anything in there."

"Malcolm is going to learn different things in his life than math or spelling," she said. "For instance, right now he's learning forbearance."

That night, Ares woke up falling. Even when his brain registered that he was secure in his bed, he continued to have the gut-inverting sensation that he had not yet landed, that the worst was yet to come.

Don't look at the clock. But it was too late. His eyes, those betrayers, shifted to the right and there was the electric-green warning—3:15. Immediately, he felt trapped in the night, and even though his mother and brother slept nearby—Laurel in her own tiny room separated from the main room by a curtain of playing cards stapled together in long strips, and Malcolm on the living-room couch, so close that Ares could have touched them if his fingers could magically pass through the laminated plywood walls of his room—he was alone. The nighttime quiet dulled the sounds of trucks and cars on the nearby highway, and the star-pocked sky obliterated the daytime lustre of golden arches and other neon enticements. Outside, there was only the desert—huge, an impermeable membrane.

Panic flooded his body and he sat up. He slid open the small window. It stuttered along its bent metal runner until it stopped halfway and wouldn't travel any farther. He inhaled deeply, smelling things he knew: the mesquite in the air, the leftover smoke of the next-door neighbor's barbecue, the distant chemical odor of the Salton Sea.

And there it was: the memory he woke with each night of his life at precisely this hour. *Go away.* But it insisted on itself. He lay back, a forearm slung across his eyes, and let it have its way.

It was always the same. Ares is eight. Laurel has pulled off the highway into the SoCo gas station in Niland, because Malcolm has just unloaded into his diaper and something yellow and foul-smelling is leaking out onto his clothes. Even Laurel, who loves everything about this baby from his shit to his snot, can't imagine making it home with this stench. The faded ducks on Malcolm's onesie look as if they were swimming in pond scum. Ares slides as far away from his brother as possible in the back seat of the Toyota Corolla hatchback, but it isn't far enough, and he starts to gag.

"Oh, come on," Laurel says. "Like you never messed your pants."

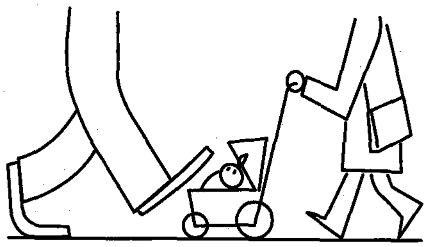
"Not like *that*," Ares moans.

The minute Laurel stops the car, Ares bolts and goes to stand on the concrete island between two gas pumps. He quickly scans the surroundings for the possibility of humiliation in the form of someone he knows from school. Laurel holds the baby in one arm. The travel wipes and a fresh diaper hang from her mouth like cat prey as she flips up the hatchback. She lays Malcolm on the ripped upholstery and goes to work.

"He's sick! What's wrong with him?" Ares says when he gets a glimpse of Malcolm's production.

"It's the heat," Laurel says. "It's giving him the runs."

It is late in the day; the warm air sits in place like a fat man in a lawn chair.



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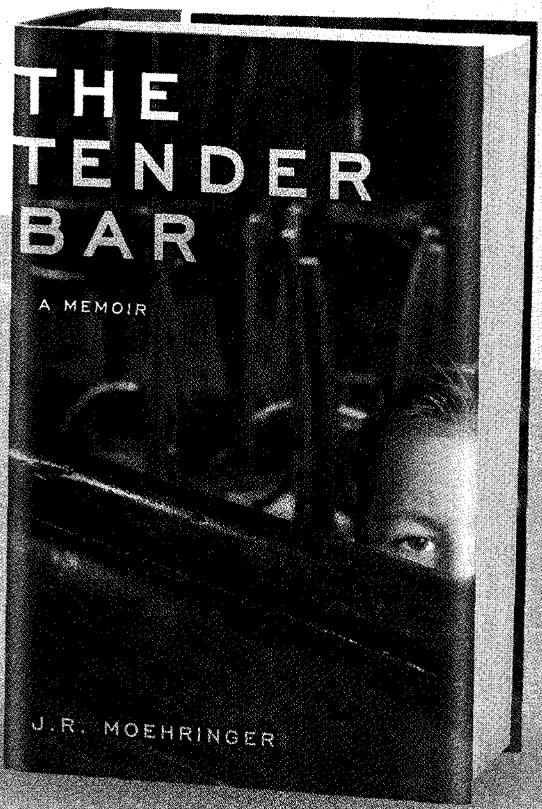

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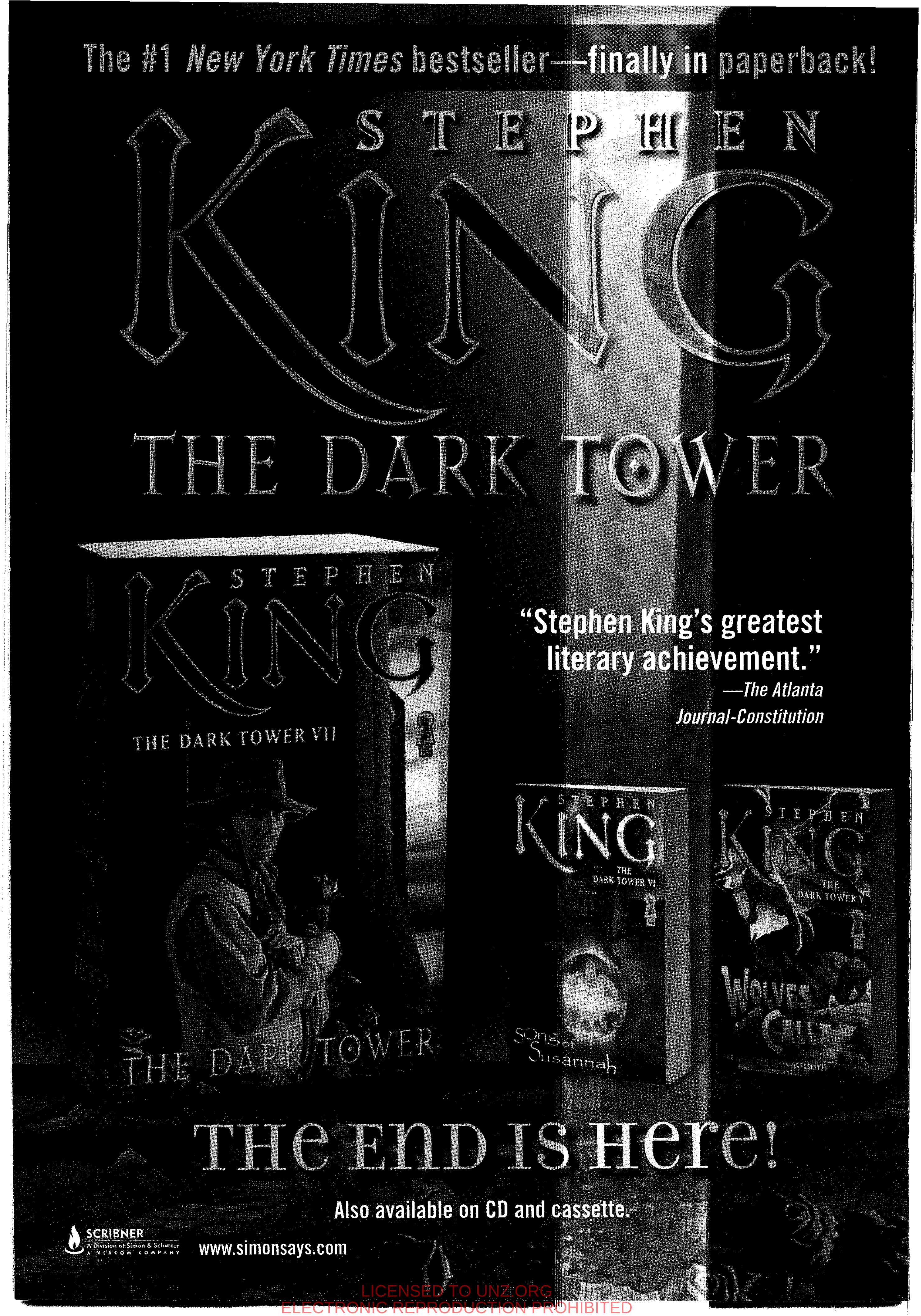

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Another five minutes, and Ares feels the kind of hot that makes him want to escape his skin. Laurel always tells him that his brown skin can withstand the desert better than her fair, freckled Irish skin, and that he should be grateful to his father for this. But Ares thinks that his skin is one more thing about his father that, as of yet, has no proven value—like his last name, Ramirez, which, along with his first name, serves as an instant invitation to ridicule. He is sure that his father, whoever he is, had no say in choosing the first name, especially since, according to Laurel, he had gone back to Peru by the time Ares was born.

Laurel carries the freshly changed Malcolm toward Ares, holding the befouled diaper before her like a gift.

"Are you kidding me?" Ares says, backing away.

"Can you just help me, please, and throw this out?" She gestures with her chin toward the garbage can that sits on the other side of the island.

"I'll take *him*," Ares says.

"Jesus," Laurel sighs. "It's just the body, honey. Everyone poops." She shifts Malcolm into Ares's arms and throws the diaper into the can, where it floats above the rim like a small iceberg on the lake of crushed taco wrappers and cellophane torn from cigarette packs. Ares is hoping that they will leave as quickly as possible so that no one will be able to associate them with this embarrassing thing, but to his horror Laurel heads toward the gas station's convenience store. Ares looks after her, seized with the fear he often has that she is walking away forever. His mother is a conditional concept.

But he is holding the baby, and she loves the baby, who is brown, too, darker than Ares, and looks like a Cahuilla Indian because that's what his father, whom Malcolm has never met, either, is. She loves this baby, and she stares into his eyes as if she were looking for a secret message in those black-bean irises, something that will tell her what comes next. She smells his skin and licks his hands and trims his fingernails with her teeth. Ares can't remember if she treated him with the same intensity when he was a baby. He is both horrified at the thought and desperate for it to be true.

Malcolm starts to squirm in Ares's arms. Ares bounces him up and down, trying to settle him, but Malcolm is getting frantic, looking over Ares's shoulder, and then twisting himself around so that he can look the other way.

"She's coming back," Ares whispers into Malcolm's sweaty neck. He makes shushing noises and even starts to sing whatever he can remember of the Barney song, looking around to make sure that no one hears him, because he has enough problems in school, with the kids asking him is he, like, a horoscope sign or something? He tells them he is the god of war, which makes them laugh but then grow glum, because they see him reading books in the hallway during recess, and they suspect that he's playing with their ignorance. That's when they get angry and start punching.

Malcolm screams, and even though Ares sings louder and switches to the SpongeBob theme song, which Malcolm loves so much that he rocks back and forth in his ExerSaucer like a spaz when the show comes on, the kid isn't having any comfort. He starts to kick Ares in the stomach. He's strong, and one kick lands right below Ares's ribs and, for a second, takes his breath away. Ares tells Malcolm to cut it out or else, and Malcolm puts his fat hands on Ares's chest and pushes himself away hard, and Ares drops him.

Malcolm goes down like a medicine ball. Ares hears the thud of his body as it hits the concrete before rolling lazily off the lip of the island onto the cracked pavement beside the wheels of the car. Next, the most terrifying thing happens: nothing. Malcolm doesn't move. He doesn't make a sound. It's as if someone had pressed the pause button on the universe and everything stood still. Ares can't hear the cars passing on the highway, or the sounds of the construction equipment going full tilt behind the convenience store. All he hears is the inside of his head, which sounds like water echoing through a pipe.

Then the finger lets go of the button and everything starts up at once—Malcolm screaming, Laurel running and yelling things that don't sound like words, her arms pushing Ares out of the way, the fat guy from the convenience store running from side to side, his red company vest flapping like useless

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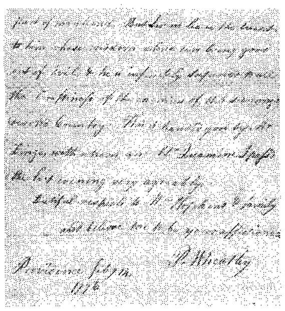

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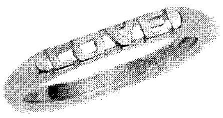

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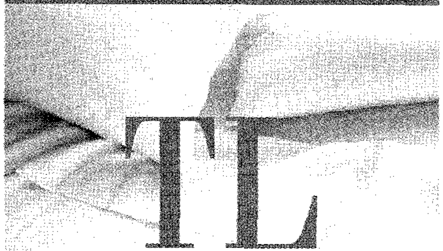

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wings. He screams, "Nine-one-one!," turns around, and does his jig back to the store while Laurel shouts, "No! No!," and gets into the car and starts the engine, not even stopping to put Malcolm in his car seat but holding him on her lap, one hand pressing him to her chest, so that a flower of blood appears on her shirt, the other gripping the wheel. She pulls out of the gas station so fast that the door closes on its own, trapping the end of her patterned skirt so that it waves back and forth as if bidding Ares goodbye. And Ares, because he doesn't yet understand what's going on, lifts his hand in response and waves to the Corolla as it disappears into its own cloud of desert dust.

Later, Victor, the convenience-store guy, drives Ares to Indio in his white Dodge Ram Charger tricked out with extra-large wheels. Ares knows that it's wrong to be excited to be in such a truck, but its height makes him giddy with a sense of power and safety that he rarely ever feels down below.

The hospital is the newest, cleanest place for miles. Ares feels like a smudge. Everything is quiet, and the nurses and orderlies move as though they weren't sure the hospital was theirs to keep. A nurse tells Victor to wait—the doctor will be out soon to talk to him and his son, at which point Victor gets nervous, and he tells the nurse that he doesn't even know this kid, really, and he'd better get back to work before he gets fired.

"Just"—he says, turning to Ares, his fleshy face settling into a perplexed look as he searches for something important to say—"don't move."

In the waiting room, the television hangs like a loose tooth from the ceiling. A Spanish-language soap opera plays without sound. A man and a woman stare silently at the TV. He holds a blood-soaked blue-and-white checked kitchen towel to his head. They look calm, and it occurs to Ares that the woman is the reason for all the blood. It's something about the way she won't look the man in the eye when she tends to his wound, and the way he pats her hand, as if to let her off the hook. There is forgiveness in the way they are together.

Ares tries to read one of the wrinkled car magazines that lie on empty chairs around him, but he can't keep himself from worrying about what his life is going to be like now that he has dropped his brother. Maybe Laurel will try to find his father and hand him over, even though she says she has no idea where the man is, and he was no one special to her anyway. Or maybe she will turn Ares in to the police and he will have to go to juvenile, like Rudolpho from the fifth grade, who set fire to the cactus garden after the whole school had come in on a Saturday to plant it for Pride Day.

After a couple of hours, Laurel comes through the swinging double doors that separate the waiting room from the rest of the hospital. A nurse follows her, carrying something that looks like a huge roll of toilet paper; Ares realizes that it's Malcolm, bandaged all over like a pathetic attempt at a Halloween mummy costume. When Laurel sees Ares, she bursts into tears and runs over to him. She pulls him out of his chair and wraps herself around him. She says, "I'm sorry. Oh, baby. I'm so, so sorry."

And, standing there with his head pressed into her soft chest, her hands stroking his head so hard that he thinks his hair may come out, he has the feeling that she is not sorry because she left him at the gas station, or because Malcolm is so banged up you can't see his face. She is sorry because she knows that, like his skin and his name, this new fact is something that will stick with him for the rest of his life.

Malcolm screamed in the night. Ares waited for the reassuring clump of Laurel's feet hitting the floor, for the sound of the card curtain fluttering noisily apart, for her groggy, soothing voice to calm Malcolm down. But then Malcolm screamed again.

"Mom!" Ares yelled, stumbling out of his bed and into the living room. His underwear was twisted around his hips, and he tried to straighten it as he felt for Malcolm in the dark. Malcolm was sitting up on his couch, hitting his leg with his hand.

"Spy, spy, spy," he said.

"Mom!" Ares called. Where was she? Why did *he* have to be the one to drag his ass out of bed in the middle of the night to take care of Malcolm? He gathered Malcolm in his arms and began to rock him, holding his brother tightly so that he couldn't scratch or hit himself, as he'd seen Laurel do countless times. When Malcolm's body began to relax, Ares risked letting go with one hand, and snapped on the light above Malcolm's bed. The card curtain was open, the sweep of it pulled to one side and caught by a hook, so that it resembled a girl's hair tucked behind an ear. Laurel was not in her bed. She was having sex with Richard, Ares thought. She'd come home at dawn, creeping into the trailer thinking that Ares had no idea she'd even been gone. This was the only information he had on her, but it was useless information, since he was sure that if he told her he knew about her nighttime journeys she'd simply smile and ruffle his hair and not even get mad. He turned his concentration back to his brother. Malcolm's eyes were wide open, but he was in a place that was neither sleep nor wakefulness. During these night terrors, Malcolm was somehow more present than he was during the day. He'd look at Ares or Laurel as though he were about to say something, perhaps even explain what he had been thinking about all his life. But Ares knew not to make the mistake of hoping. Hope was only a selfish desire for absolution.

"There's no spider," he said, rocking his brother, although he knew it was unlikely that Malcolm was actually talking about a spider. He was used to taking Malcolm's sounds and gestures and inventing logic around them. That is what he and his mother did: they created Malcolm's world for him and pretended they were right. "He wants juice," Laurel would say if Malcolm smacked his lips in the direction of the refrigerator. But what if they were wrong? What if Malcolm wanted the opposite of juice? What if he didn't want at all? What if the fall had knocked desire right out of him?

When Malcolm's body was no longer a heavy lump in Ares's arms but something stiff with the architecture of will, Ares knew that the terror was coming to an end.

"Hey, buddy," Ares said.

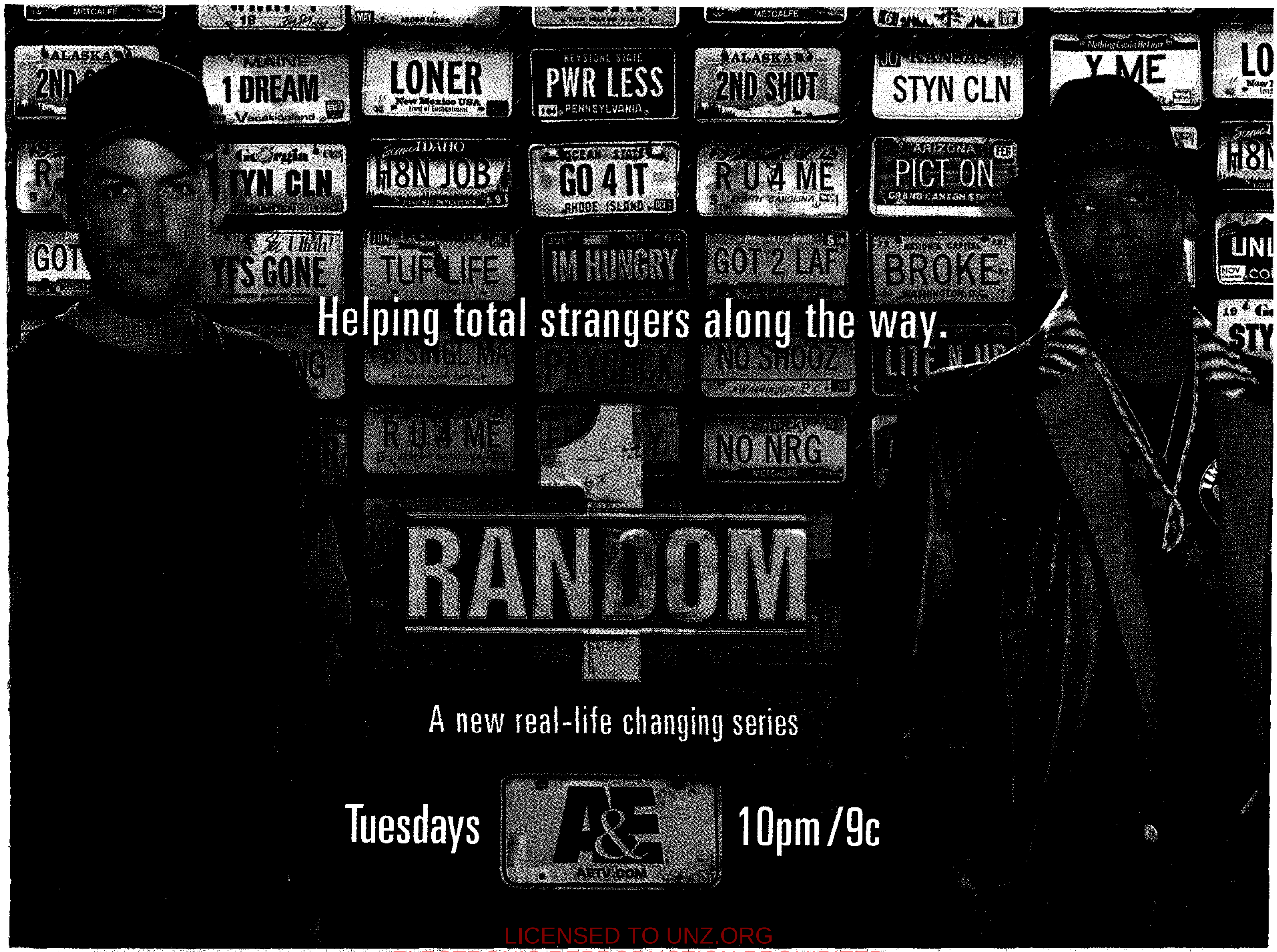
Malcolm looked toward Laurel's room.

"She's not here right now," Ares said.

Malcolm craned his neck and looked back at Ares.

"You had a dream," Ares said, although he was sure that this was wrong. The terrors were not dreams. They were more like the moment when a cartoon character runs off a cliff—before he starts to fall; the terrors were a seizure of understanding. Ares thought that in these nocturnal moments his brother had periods of recognition, periods in which he realized that he was trapped by silence, by useless fixations, by the need to make the sound *pa* over and over again, or to count peas. Ares thought that if he were in his brother's situation he'd be frightened all the time.

By the time Malcolm fell asleep, Ares was fully awake. His body was wired, restless. He lay in his bed, staring at his



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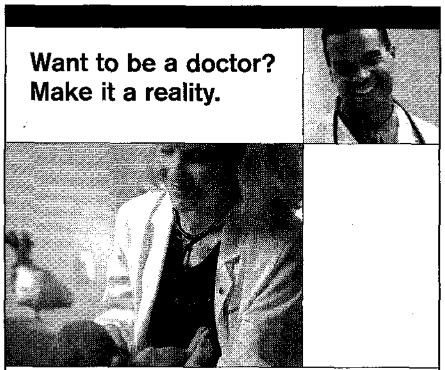

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bookshelf, another castoff that Laurel had picked up in Slab City, the old gunnery range where Richard, along with the other assorted snowbirds and wanderers, stayed every winter. Even in the dark, he could make out the dull, pseudo-gilded letters on the binding of "Gold and Gods of Peru," a stalwart hardback among the shorter, stubbier paperbacks in his collection. It was a library book, long overdue. Two years overdue, he reminded himself, and felt the familiar pinch of guilt he experienced whenever he caught sight of the book. He had checked it out of the school library in the fourth grade in order to write a report on Peru. Somehow, he had never returned it. It wasn't that he'd forgotten; he had thought about returning the book many times. But each time he did the idea seemed overwhelming, exhausting, as if the book weighed a hundred pounds and he would be required to carry it by himself. The book's absence had escaped the notice of Mrs. Pearl, the school librarian, and he had so far got away without paying a fine. But this made him feel even worse. Getting away with something was worse than suffering the consequences. He was too embarrassed to go into the library anymore. He had become a reader of Dumpster literature—books that other people didn't think were good enough to keep. In this way, he had read "Dianetics," a biography of Dolly Parton, some pretty good espionage books, and "East of Eden," minus twenty pages in the middle, which had been ripped out.

He had thought that Laurel might say something about the Peru book, but she didn't make a habit of engaging in Ares's school life, and it was unlikely that she would notice the book unless Ares pointed it out to her. He reached over and took it from the shelf. A month ago, he had found out from other kids at school that Mrs. Pearl's son had been arrested for murder. His own crime now seemed pathetic. He was an accidental book thief. Mrs. Pearl was the mother of a killer.

The sound of tires crunching over the rubble driveway swelled and then stopped. The car engine cut out, and Ares heard the gentle ticking of the motor as the door squeaked open and slammed shut. He could barely hear Laurel's entrance into the trailer. He thought about calling out, letting his mother know that he was onto her. But what if that made her stop going out? Then he would never be able to experience the relief of her return. The card curtain made a noise like a thousand tumbling dominoes as she let it fall from its hook.

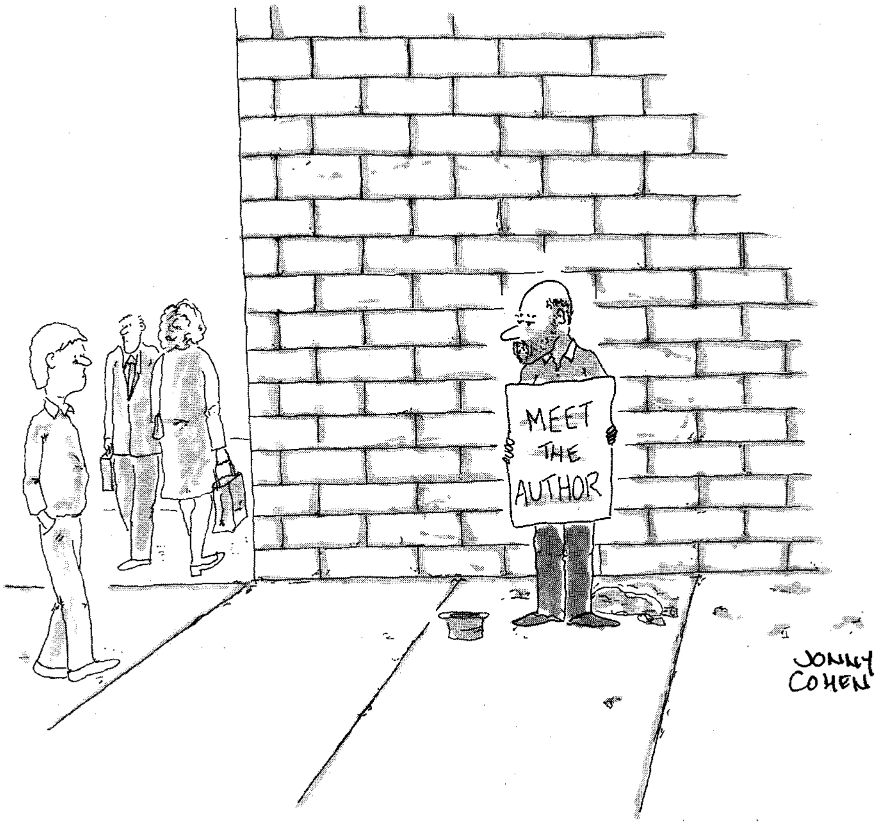
He carried "Gold and Gods of Peru" to school the next day, but when he approached Mrs. Pearl's desk he couldn't bring himself to take it out of his backpack. She looked up at him expectantly. Her hair was pulled back into a ponytail, but one strand had broken loose and she repeatedly tucked it back in, looking embarrassed, as though something more private than a lock of hair had escaped confinement. She had a round face and thin lips, and freckles spilling across the bridge of her nose. He thought she was too pretty to have a murderer for a son. She had no eyebrows, but she drew little arches above her eyes with a dark pencil, which made her look as though everything astonished her. Her nails had grown out beyond their pink polish, and little half-moons of natural color showed where the nail met the skin. Ares felt as if he were seeing a part of her that he wasn't supposed to see.

"Do you need help?" she asked.

"No."

A framed picture sat on her desk. It was of a boy, smiling. He had dark hair like Mrs. Pearl, and real eyebrows. Acne had made a rutted landscape of his face. He sat in front of the familiar blue sheet that the school photographers hung on the gym wall when they came for photo day. He was looking off to the side and up, as if trying to think of something. The name of the photographer was embossed in gold across the bottom of the photo. You could get the photo without the name on it, but that cost extra. Like his mother, he supposed, Mrs. Pearl had just kept the proof copy and thrown out the order form.

Ares had heard the talk about Mrs. Pearl's son, but there were many different stories: he had murdered someone in a botched holdup at a convenience store; or he was part of the gang that had been terrorizing towns around the Salton Sea. No one really knew what was true, but each kid pronounced his version of events with grave certainty,



thrilled, for a moment, to be the one everyone else looked to for the truth. The photo on Mrs. Pearl's desk was in a heavy brown frame decorated with painted flowers. The words "For Mom" were stencilled on one of the petals. Ares knew that inmates made license plates, and he wondered if they made picture frames, too.

Mrs. Pearl saw where Ares's gaze had fallen. "There's a sign-up sheet for the computer," she said, pointing to an adjacent wall.

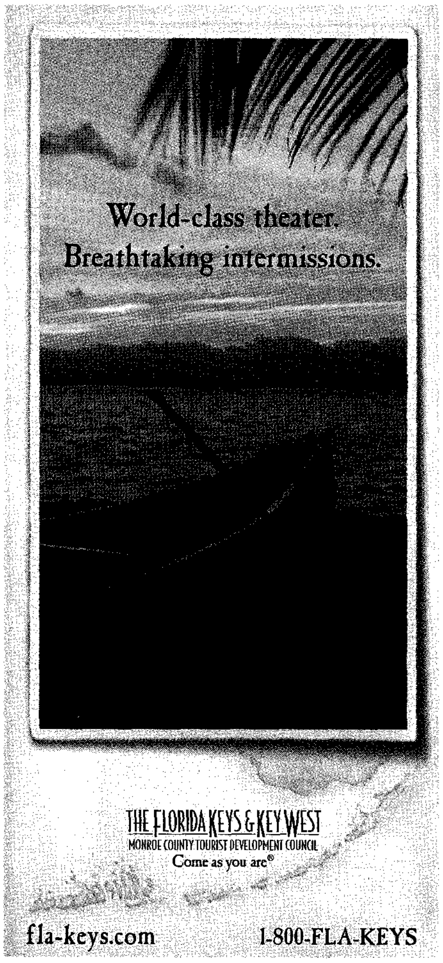
"I don't need a computer," he said.

She waited for him to state his purpose. When he remained silent, she sighed and looked mildly annoyed: another kid ruining her day. He left the library.

That afternoon, Ares's team played a team from Indio. Ares ran past the best player on the team and whispered "Typical" three times. The shooter missed, but Ares's team lost anyway.

Malcolm and Ares biked past the Gunnery Range checkpoint station. It was abandoned, but a beer can stood on the window ledge. Teen-agers came out here to drink and get high. Every so often, the cops would do a sweep, and then there would be an assembly about "Just say no." Ares and Malcolm rode past the station and on into Slab City, past the bar and an advertisement for a community talent show that was to take place in three weeks. Ares knew that Slab City had an unofficial mayor, and that it even had its own shortwave radio broadcast. But you had to bring in your own water and get rid of your own sewage, because Slab City wasn't really an official city. Laurel said that none of the people there paid for the land they lived on. There were people in Slab City who had big, expensive trailers and who could afford to pay taxes and live in a place with sewage pipes and fences, but they chose not to because, she said, they were also the kind of people who liked to get away with things.

The day was hot, and nobody lingered outside the trailers. Ares banged on the door of Richard's Airstream, an aluminum tube, shaped like a cigar, its surface a patchwork of cast-off material that he cobbled together whenever the trailer needed repairs. Richard had to stoop to fit his long, narrow body inside the frame. He shaved his head, and Ares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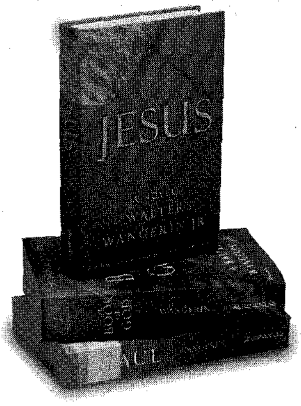

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could see two thick blue veins running behind his temples. He looked out at the boys through round wire-rimmed glasses.

Malcolm squawked happily. "You yell like that, someone's liable to come out of their trailer and shoot you," Richard said, though Ares could tell that he enjoyed Malcolm's enthusiasm. One of Richard's pant legs was tucked into a scuffed motorcycle boot; the other was hitched undecidedly halfway up the shank of its boot. A Chinese symbol hung from a leather thong at his neck. Richard claimed that he had once worked in Asia. He also said that he had fought, but not in a war. He was never specific about which country he had worked in or whom he had fought for, and whenever Ares tried to pin him down Richard was evasive. When Ares learned about the C.I.A., he decided that Richard must be an agent. But Laurel said that Richard wasn't good at keeping secrets—this was how she knew that he didn't really love her. She said she didn't think that he was someone the government would trust.

Malcolm couldn't contain his excitement. He reached for Richard's shirt, trying to pull him out of the trailer.

"O.K., O.K.," Richard said. "But I'm not paying this time. Business is bad."

"No fair," Ares said.

"That's my deal," Richard said, his voice so low it sounded as though it were rumbling from the back of a cavern. "Take it or leave it."

Malcolm loved the bumpy ride over the rock dunes. The jeep lurched forward and back and from side to side all at the same time, so that it didn't seem as if they were actually getting anywhere. Richard huffed and groaned, his cigarette bobbing between his lips. He made a big show of effort as he shifted gears with his right hand. The long fingers of his left hand gripped the frayed plastic cover of the steering wheel. If the wheel were a person's neck, Ares thought, that person would be dead by now. He wondered if Richard had ever killed a person with his bare hands.

A few minutes later, Richard stopped the jeep, and Malcolm and Ares scrambled out and ran off into the rocky foothills. "What's yours is mine!" Richard called after them.

When Malcolm and Ares went scrapping with Richard, Richard rewarded their finds: a nickel for small scraps; a quarter for something big. Richard said that in previous years he had found bombs, and that he'd pay five dollars if the boys came up with one, but Ares had never seen a bomb, and he wasn't sure what it would look like. Richard sold the scrap to a junker, who then sold it to a foundry in Mexico. At one time, he had been able to make a certain living off his finds—enough to carry him through a winter in the desert. But the Mexicans weren't doing much business these days, and scrapping had become more of a way to pass time than an actual job.

Richard threw a beat-up cowboy hat over his bald head, took his Geiger counter out of the jeep, and began to walk slowly. The machine gave off a soft hum that Malcolm tried to match with his own voice as he walked around in crazy eights. Ares was never sure that Malcolm understood what they were looking for; he presented rocks and pieces of metal to Richard with the same zeal. And sometimes he just wandered, head bent toward the ground, and Ares knew that he wasn't looking for anything at all.

Ares dragged his feet so that they displaced the top layer of soil. He was disappointed that Richard wasn't going to pay them for their discoveries, and he considered blowing off the whole search. But the truth was, even without the incentive of a reward, he loved studying the ground like this, directing his gaze and his entire mind onto minute bits of earth as they passed below him. When he was with Richard, Ares didn't think about Malcolm, or what he had done to make Malcolm the way he was. He didn't think about his mother, his library book, or Coach Ortega. He thought about dirt. The desert ceased to be the impervious, dry expanse that it usually was. It became the world writ small, miniature valleys and mountains, square inches of variegated detail. It became a place where you could see that you were not always right about what a thing was. It gave him hope.

Twenty yards from the jeep, the counter sent up a strong, insistent beep. Ares and Malcolm ran over to Richard, who stooped down, studying something on the ground. When Ares reached him, Richard held up a magazine clip. "This is a surprise," he said. "Thought things were pretty well picked over. Unless this is new. Meth addicts killing each other with machine guns now." He shook his head and handed the clip to Malcolm. "Put it in the box." Malcolm held the magazine to his chest like a treasured doll and ran to the jeep.

"He thinks it's something to love," Ares said.

"He wouldn't be the first person to love a gun, that's for sure."

"Mom says it's O.K., the weird stuff that he does."

"Well, the way I see it, when you're in a place you forget what it looks like from the outside. It's like how you never see yourself grow taller or older. You need other people to tell you the truth. That's how we all end up living the lives we do. Nobody ever tells us what we really look like."

Ares wondered if his mother had ever told Richard about Malcolm's fall. If Richard had been at the gas station that day, he might have caught Malcolm with his big, powerful hands. He might have saved him.

An hour later, Malcolm and Ares had found nothing. Richard had found an alloy bullet casing and some random pieces of metal. After throwing his finds into the box, Richard squatted down by the back wheel of the jeep and lit another cigarette. He took off his hat and wiped the sweat from his head with his palm. Malcolm picked up the Geiger counter and walked with it, waving it over the ground. It was turned off, but Malcolm made the sound of the motor, and then such a perfect replication of the beep of discovery that Richard and Ares both looked up expectantly.

"Should put that talent to good use," Richard said, exhaling smoke.

"How?" Ares said.

Richard shrugged. "Decoy. Could make a person think something was there that wasn't. You'd be shooting at a ghost."

Ares tried to figure out how this comment fit into his growing picture of Richard. Maybe he was a bounty hunter. Maybe he was a hired killer. Maybe he was a criminal, too.

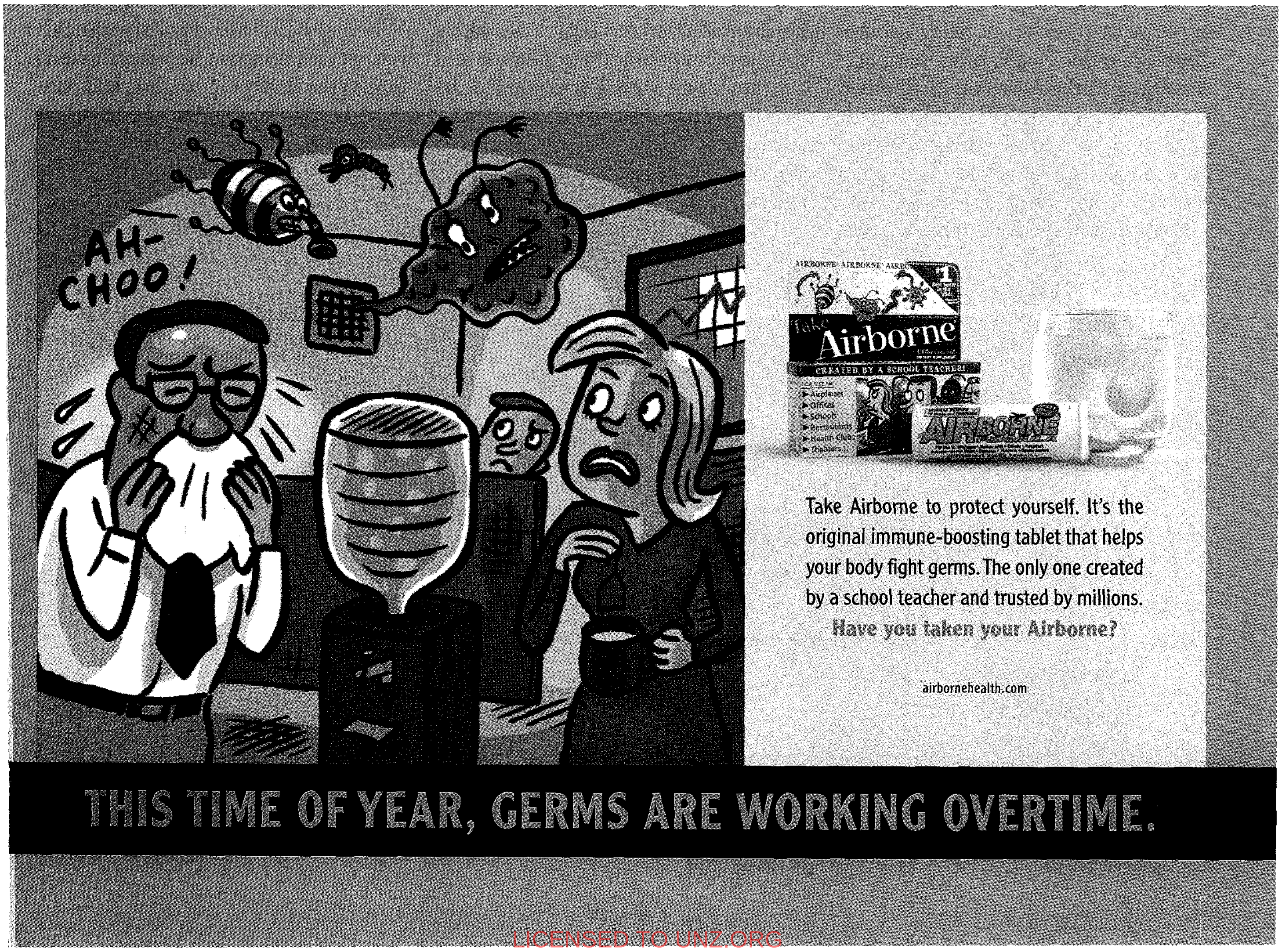
Malcolm ran back to the jeep grinning. Richard reached into his pocket and pulled out two dollar bills. He gave one to each boy.

"You said you weren't paying," Ares said.

"For keeping me company," Richard said.

As Ares turned his bicycle into the parking lot of the store in front of the date farm, he looked back over his shoulder to make sure that Malcolm was following him. Only a few cars were still there at the end of the day—tourists collecting their prepackaged dates for the trip home.

Inside, Ares ordered two date shakes from the girl behind the deli counter; she looked like a drawing in the sex book that his mother used to keep by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the side of her bed, but which was now the foundation layer of one of Malcolm's pyramids. The girl had dark eyes rimmed with black pencil, and her mouth was full and turned up at the ends, so that even though she wasn't smiling at Ares, even though she barely seemed to register him as she blended the shakes and yelled above the sound to the other, fatter girl behind the counter, he imagined her as one of those drawings, the outlines of her body formed from repeated strokes of a pencil.

Malcolm waited outside at a picnic table, patiently ripping a paper napkin into small bits. Ares handed him the shake and, to Malcolm's delight, blew the paper off the straw. After a few sips, Ares was sick of the oversweet shake, but Malcolm was stunned into pleasure by the drink. He didn't take his mouth from the straw the entire time he drank, not even to breathe. Malcolm was this way with everything he did; it was as if a given activity wiped out all thought of anything else. His entire existence narrowed in on the time and the physical space of one second. And then another. Ares knew that his brother's problem was exactly this disconcerting habit of fixating on one single, often meaningless thing to the exclusion of all other, more relevant information. But he sometimes wondered whether it would be a relief to be like Malcolm, and not have the whole army of your impulses and contradictory desires trying to crash the gates of your consciousness at once.

Malcolm reached the bottom of his shake with a wet slurp. He finally took his mouth off the straw and inhaled a laugh. He peeled the plastic lid off the shake and licked the underside.

"I guess you liked that," Ares said.

"Ma, ma, ma, ma," Malcolm said.

"No more." There was no end to Malcolm's appetite. He ate whenever food was offered to him, even if he had just had a huge meal. Laurel and Ares had learned to tell him when he was finished eating, and they were expert at distracting him so that his mind could tear itself away from the idea of food and land on a new obsession for a while. Of all Malcolm's traits, it was this hunger that upset Ares the most. It filled him with a great nostalgic sadness for lost things, the way a rich person might feel if he had to live as a pauper, always remembering the fancy cars and clothes of a bygone life.

Ares took Malcolm's cup, replaced the top, and tossed it into the nearby garbage can. Malcolm let out a piercing scream and raced to retrieve the cup. Gently, he wiped it off. "Pop, pop, pop," he chanted over and over. Ares knew that he would bring the cup home and add it to his menagerie of inanimate objects—rocks, sticks, empty envelopes, and soda-can pull tabs that he collected and often spoke to in strange murmurs and squeaks.

On the way home, Malcolm and Ares pedalled side by side. When they saw a flock of white pelicans making their low flight toward the sea, Malcolm looked at Ares with a huge grin.

"Do it, man," Ares said, encouragingly. "Go ahead and do it."

And Malcolm let out a caw that was so exact, so piercingly beautiful, that Ares felt his heart contract.

"What did he eat?" Laurel said, as she watched Malcolm bound up the trailer steps, screeching his uncanny pelican caw. Once inside, Malcolm spun around the living room, his arms spread on either side of him.

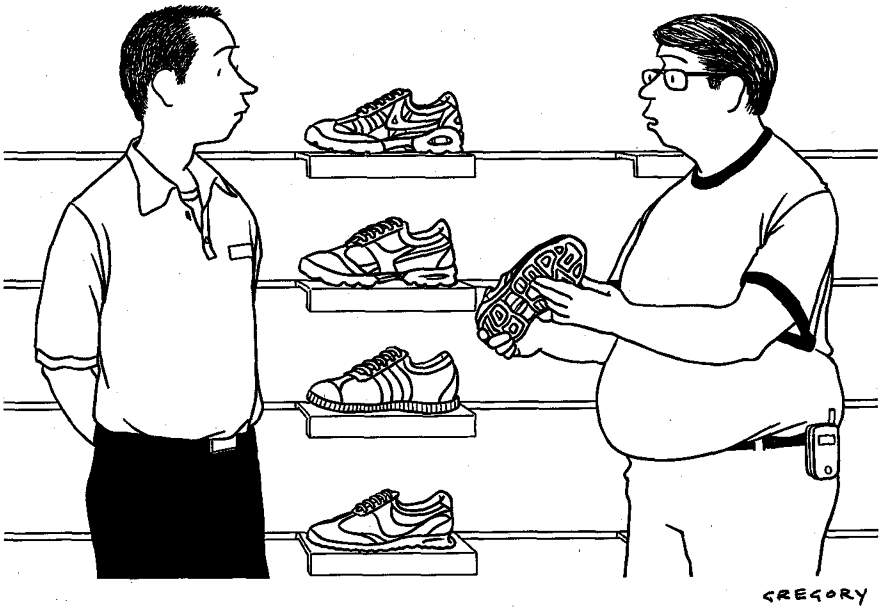
"A shake," Ares said. He knew that sugar, for Malcolm, was like a friend who was always urging you to do things that would get you into trouble. He waited for Laurel's admonition, but it didn't come. She simply stood, hands on hips, head tilted to one side. She watched Malcolm intently, waiting for the right moment to step in and grab him the way girls in the school playground waited to leap into the path of a swinging jump rope at exactly the right second, so that they wouldn't trip. When she did move in, she quickly wrapped Malcolm in her arms, holding him to her body. He laughed and continued trying to flap his arms, but she had him trapped.

"Let's have a bath, baby," she said into his hair as she moved him awkwardly toward the bathroom. "Help me with his clothes," she called back to Ares.

Ares reluctantly followed behind, reaching for Malcolm as his mother bent down to run the bath water. He grabbed Malcolm's T-shirt. "Arms up," he said. Malcolm didn't obey, and instead squirmed inside Ares's hold, grinning and laughing. "Arms up, dude," Ares said more forcefully, frustrated by his brother, and by the obviousness of his own unmentioned mistake.

"Don't yell," Laurel said over the sound of water slapping against the plastic-lined tub. "It doesn't help."

Ares got the shirt up and over Malcolm's head, then started on his jeans. He leaned down, and Malcolm draped his body over Ares's bent back, making it nearly impossible for Ares to move or to push the pants down Malcolm's hips. When he finally got Malcolm's



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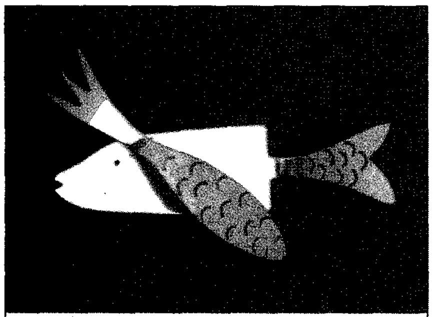

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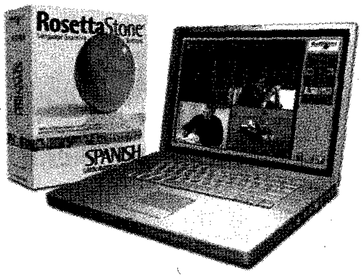

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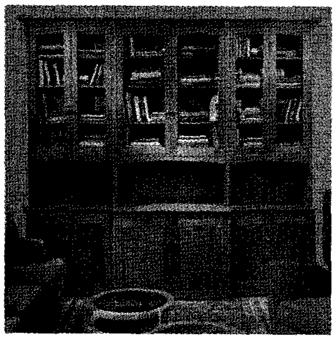

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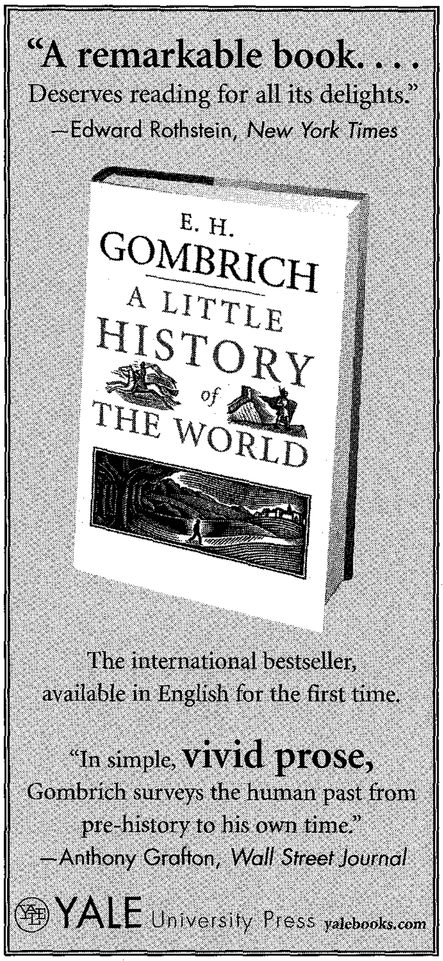
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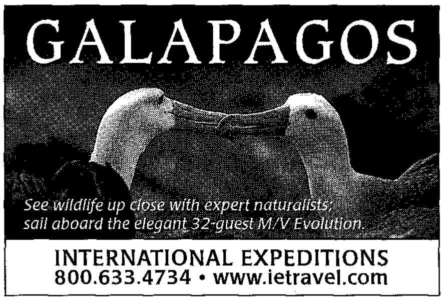
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pants to his ankles, Ares sat on the floor to untie his shoes. Malcolm sat, too, and then lay back on the bathroom floor, thrilled by his nakedness. His hands went to his penis.

“Cut it out, man,” Ares said.

“That’s why it’s there,” Laurel said, reaching under Malcolm’s arms and lifting him up and into the tub.

“Fuck!” Ares exclaimed when the splash hit his shirt and pants.

“Lovely,” she said.

“Sorry.”

“That word coming out of those beautiful lips,” she said. “O.K., baby.” Laurel turned to Malcolm, sighing. “Want bubbles?” She showed Malcolm the nearly empty bottle capped with a plastic elephant head.

Ares left the bathroom, closing the door behind him. Still, he could hear the sound of Laurel struggling to quiet Malcolm. She sang “Hush Little Baby,” and Malcolm droned along. Ares headed out of the trailer and walked to the edge of town, toward the beach. He found a fallen palm frond and dragged it close to the water. The Salton Sea, or the “sinkhole,” as he referred to it, moved listlessly in the windless early evening. A few birds alighted on its surface, floated around in the water, then took off again, like people at a drive-through. Ares remembered when he was six, a time before Malcolm, when his own arms and legs were as thin and rubbery as licorice rope. He had pleaded with Laurel to take him for a swim in “my ocean.” Then, the sinkhole had been his biggest treasure, a jewel as huge as he could imagine the world to be, its distant shore his unreachable horizon. Laurel had let him swim, although even then there were reports of fish dying, poisoned by the polluted runoff from farm irrigation that fed the sea.

Ares thought that Mrs. Pearl must really love her son—to keep his high-school picture on her desk like that, where everyone could see it. Maybe she didn’t believe he was really a killer. Maybe she thought that if she took down the picture people would think that she had given up on him. Ares hoped that he wouldn’t get acne when he was older. But probably he would, since he was a thief and also a trash-talker and there had to be some kind of payback.

He walked home, past the wood-frame houses and trailers, some derelict, some enlivened by cactus gardens and tangles of sagging flowers and date palms that resembled girls with long torsos and tiny heads. He passed the general store that sold cans of chili and sauerkraut, frozen dinners, emergency flashlights, and lengths of garden hose. The school bus stopped in front of the store each morning, carrying the young children to Niland and the older ones to the high school in Calipatria. By the time the bus returned each afternoon, there were only five or six kids on it.

He often wondered why he and Malcolm and their mother didn’t live in Palm Springs or Palm Desert, someplace closer to his mother’s work. Laurel said it was because they owned their trailer, and she could never afford to buy property in those rich-people places. But Ares thought there were other reasons, too. The sea, that repository of crippled nature, comforted Laurel. Sometimes he saw her there in the evenings, staring out at the flat plane of water while Malcolm wandered around the shore, stooping to inspect garbage. The Salton Sea needed its champions the way stray dogs needed rescuers, people who turned up their noses at the purchase of purebreds when there were so many abandoned frightened mongrels lurking beneath underpasses and beside freeways.

He wondered if his family would be able to survive anywhere else. Bombay Beach, like all the half attempts at towns nearby, was a place for people who had a provisional relationship to the world. Mecca, Niland—these towns were full of migrant laborers, drug dealers, snowbirds in their patched-together homes, like Richard. Daily, Ares watched Border Patrol cars speeding south along the highway, lights flashing self-importantly like some backward version of a police escort. Kids were pulled out of school all the time, and you never saw them again.

By the time Ares got home, Malcolm was asleep. Laurel was sitting at the kitchen table, knitting a hat.

“Sorry about the shake,” Ares said.

“Maybe sugar isn’t such a good idea unless we’re really prepared for the consequences.”

“You told me that before.”

“You probably forgot.”

“I didn’t forget. I remembered it the whole time.”

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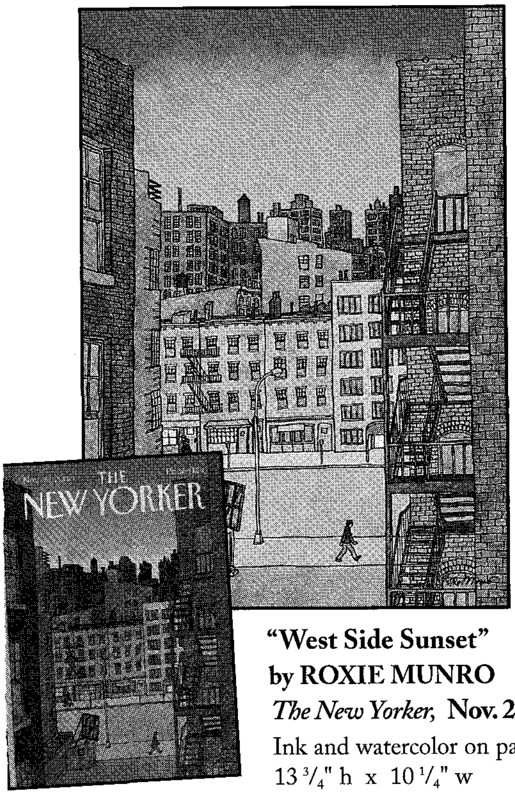

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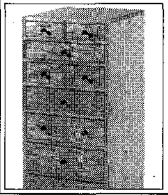

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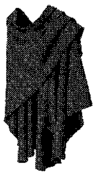

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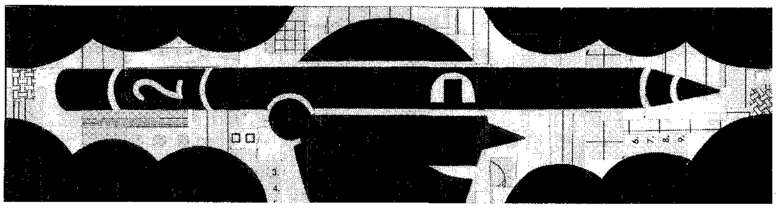


A CRITIC AT LARGE

RAIL-SPLITTING

Two opposite approaches to Honest Abe.

BY CALEB CRAIN

At the age of seven, Abraham Lincoln poked his rifle through a crack in the family's log cabin and shot a turkey. It was the high point of his career as a hunter, and also the end of it. By his own account, he never afterward "pulled a trigger on any larger game." He was later seen returning baby birds to their nests and defending turtles from boys with hot coals. When he was twenty-three, he captained a militia to fight Indians in Illinois but never saw action. "I had a good many bloody struggles with the musquetoes," he recalled. Three decades later, he presided over a war that killed more Americans than any other, before or since. "Doesn't it strike you as queer," he asked an Indiana congressman, "that I, who couldn't cut the head off of a chicken, and who was sick at the sight of blood, should be cast into the middle of a great war, with blood flowing all about me?"

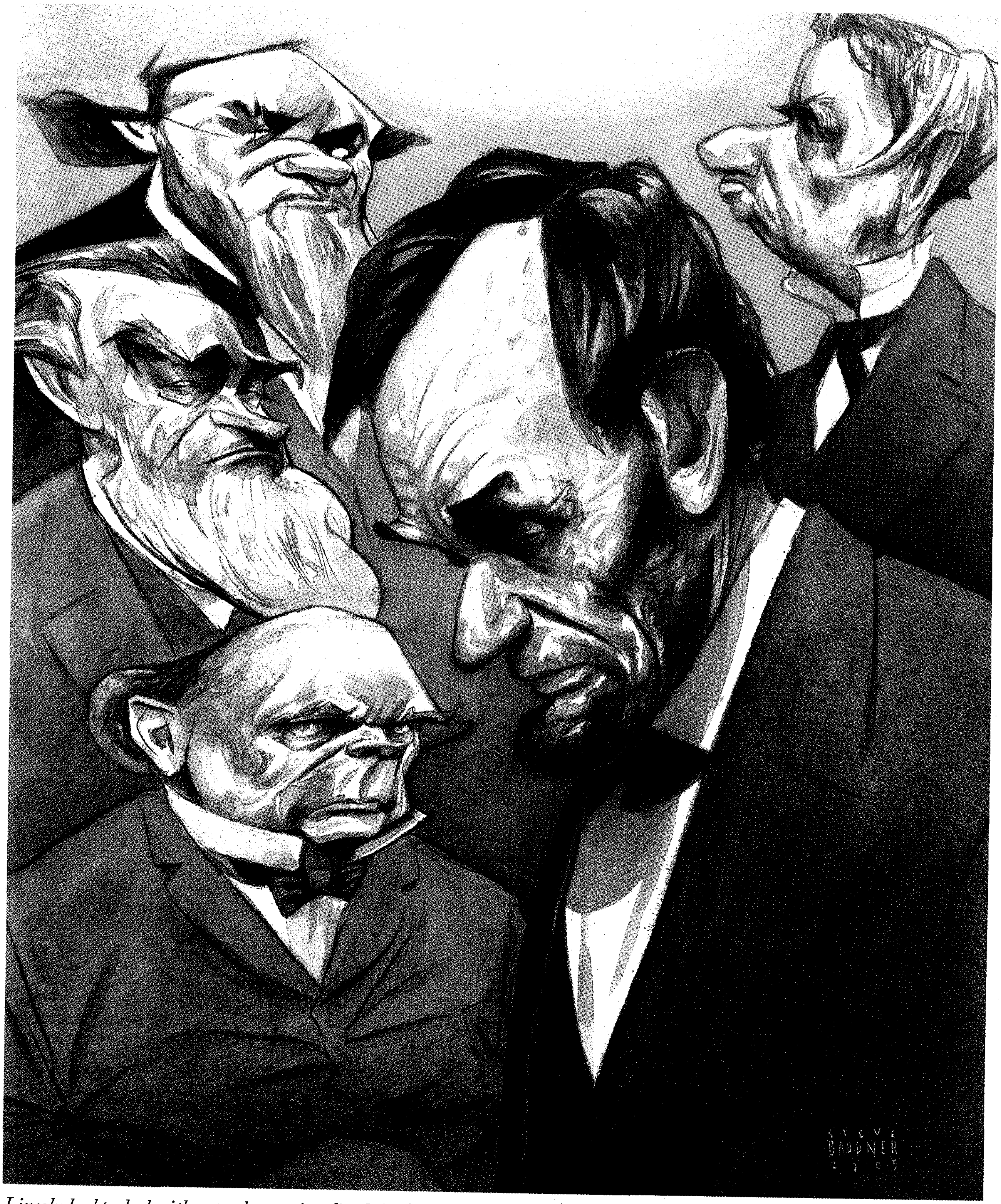
The paradox is at the heart of Lincoln's appeal. Nothing about his personality was simple, and questions of state were involved in its complexities. Did he lie about why he went to war? Did he need to be so aggressive—more so than many of his generals—about winning? Was the Civil War worth it? Lincoln was a man of many doubts, but not about these questions. Despite an unassuming manner, he fought with startling conviction. "I am a patient man—always willing to forgive on the Christian terms of repentance," he told a Maryland legislator in 1862, adding, however, that "it may as well be understood, once for all, that I shall not surrender this game leaving any available card unplayed."

Anyone who wants to understand Lincoln today must first dig through a century and a half of other people's attempts, but every biographer hopes that, with more research and a fresh angle, misconceptions will fall away and the man himself will come into view. In two new books, Joshua Wolf Shenk and Doris Kearns Goodwin pursue opposite strategies to catch a glimpse of the true Lincoln: Shenk goes deep, and Goodwin goes wide. In "Lincoln's Melancholy: How Depression Challenged a President and Fueled His Greatness" (Houghton Mifflin; $25), Shenk, a journalist and an independent scholar, argues that Lincoln suffered from depression. He believes that the illness deepened Lincoln's capacity for empathy and that Lincoln brought to the Presidency a self-discipline he learned while managing his illness. Goodwin, the author of three histories of twentieth-century Presidents, agrees in passing that Lincoln had great "emotional intelligence," but his inner life does not much concern her. In "Team of Rivals: The Political Genius of Abraham Lincoln" (Simon & Schuster; $35), she situates Lincoln in his executive context. She thinks it was a stroke of managerial genius for Lincoln to appoint to his first Cabinet three rivals he had beaten for the Republican Presidential nomination in 1860. By painting a group portrait of these men, she hopes to see Lincoln from a different vantage—reflected in their eyes.

Both Shenk and Goodwin have new stories, many of which they have found in reminiscences. Because people revise their memories as they age, scientific-minded Lincoln scholars have scorned reminiscence since the mid-twentieth century. In the past decade, however, biographers have given it a second look, in part because there are almost no other sources that describe Lincoln's youth. Shenk is self-conscious about the risks; Goodwin seems to be simply omnivorous. By coincidence, both make use of a hitherto obscure anecdote published in the New York *World* in 1908. In the mountains of North Caucasus, Leo Tolstoy is reported to have shown a photograph of Lincoln to a local tribesman. The tribesman "gazed for several minutes silently, like one in a reverent prayer," Shenk and Goodwin quote in chorus. Then their quotations diverge: Shenk goes on to describe the "secret sorrow" that the tribesman saw in Lincoln's features; Goodwin relates Tolstoy's comment that Lincoln's "supremacy expresses itself altogether in his peculiar moral power and in the greatness of his character."

Shenk maintains that his book is "not a psychobiography," and he doesn't speculate on the cause of Lincoln's depression. He does not dwell on Lincoln's father, a struggling farmer who discouraged him from reading and occasionally hit him; his mother, who died when he was eight, and who, he once claimed, "was a bastard—was the daughter of a nobleman"; or his stepmother, who loved him unstintingly. But Shenk has no doubt that Lincoln was clinically depressed, and works up a case history accordingly. Over the years, many described Lincoln as downcast. Joshua Fry Speed, his most intimate friend, reported that his first impression of Lincoln was "gloomy." A man who saw Lincoln in an Illinois courthouse in 1859 thought that he had "the saddest eyes of any human being that I have ever seen."

At twenty-six, Lincoln had what seems to have been a nervous breakdown, the first of two. Shenk notes that unipolar depression typically emerges in the mid- to late twenties. He reckons that, since Lincoln had two breakdowns, psychiatrists today would classify his case as a "major depressive disorder, recurrent." And he finds a family history of



Lincoln had to deal with not only a nation divided against itself but a Cabinet as well: (clockwise) Chase, Bates, Stanton, Seward.

STEVE BRODNER

mental illness. A paranoid uncle, Mordecai Lincoln, lived alone and tinkered with pigeon coops; visiting family members, he would play the violin and weep in lieu of conversation. Mary Jane Lincoln, the daughter of a cousin, was committed to the State Hospital for the Insane in Jacksonville, Illinois, in 1867, and Shenk has found the entry in the hospital's admissions book: "Insane thirteen years—Cause unknown / Not thought to be hereditary—Not suicidal / Her father was cousin to Abraham Lincoln and she has features much like his." (The last detail could not have been easy for her to bear. According to Goodwin, a Houston newspaper complained in 1860 that Lincoln "has most unwarrantably abused the privilege which all politicians have of being ugly.")

The story of Lincoln's first break-

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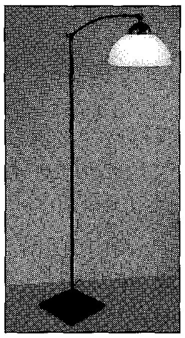

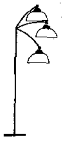

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down is controversial, because the only evidence comes from interviews conducted after his death by William H. Herndon, his law partner and one of his early biographers. In February of 1835, after a first stint in the Illinois legislature, Lincoln returned to New Salem, Illinois, and resumed studying law. He may also have resumed courting Ann Rutledge, the attractive and plump young daughter of the village tavern-keeper. The testimony is murky, perhaps because the courtship was kept quiet; Rutledge was formally engaged to another man, who had left town three years earlier after revealing that he was using a false name. Nothing came of the romance between Lincoln and Rutledge, if, in fact, there was one, because in August, 1835, she died, during an outbreak of what was probably typhoid. Lincoln talked of suicide, some observers recalled, and friends took turns watching him. A couple of people remembered him saying that he could not bear "the idea of its raining on her Grave."

In a lively afterword, Shenk chronicles the rise, fall, and resurrection of Ann Rutledge. Herndon saw her as the key to Lincoln's melancholy, and his tale of secret love spread widely; Amtrak runs a train named after Rutledge. But later historians declared the romance a myth, pointing out that Herndon drank, hated the woman Lincoln eventually married, and asked leading questions. Rutledge lay abandoned on the scholarly battlefield until the late twentieth century, when a new generation encountered her. Many different sources had told Herndon about the romance, and the story wasn't inherently implausible. The scholar Douglas L. Wilson winnowed the testimony with remarkable clearheadedness in a 1998 book, "Honor's Voice: The Transformation of Abraham Lincoln." Wilson concluded that Lincoln was indeed secretly engaged to Rutledge, and guessed that Lincoln's grief was aggravated by the fear that in losing her he was losing the respectable future he'd been working toward. Shenk follows Wilson's parsing of the evidence but proposes an alternative, somewhat more medical, interpretation: perhaps Lincoln's friends inferred an engagement, which did not in fact exist, in order to explain a depressive episode. "The fact that Lincoln broke down after Rutledge's death, of course, doesn't necessarily mean that her death produced his breakdown," Shenk writes.

Though glum, the young Lincoln was ambitious. The story of how he and Joshua Speed first met is well known. In April, 1837, Lincoln arrived in Springfield, Illinois, without cash or a place to sleep, and Speed, then a shopkeeper, impulsively invited him to reduce his expenses by sharing his bed. Shenk sees in Speed's offer a functional side to Lincoln's depression: it made people want to help him. But Lincoln in 1837 was not quite as pitiful as the story makes him sound. He had already served in the state legislature, where he had defended a bank from Democratic sniping, encouraged government investment in infrastructure, proved instrumental in moving the state capital to his new home town of Springfield, and even defied a majority in a 77–6 vote to demur from a resolution declaring the right to hold slaves "sacred" under the Constitution. There were unsentimental reasons to befriend such a rising star.

One of the young Lincoln's heroes was the statesman Henry Clay, a senator from Kentucky, where Lincoln was born, and a leader of the Whigs, who believed that the virtue of political freedom was proved by the economic prosperity that followed. Like Clay, Lincoln became a lawyer in spite of poverty and very little schooling, and made a living in the law between spells in politics. Between 1820 and 1821, and again in 1850, Clay gave crucial support to compromises that saved the United States from splitting over the issue of slavery. His example may have inspired Lincoln to think that he could affirm the human rights of African-Americans, oppose secession, and nonetheless win elections.

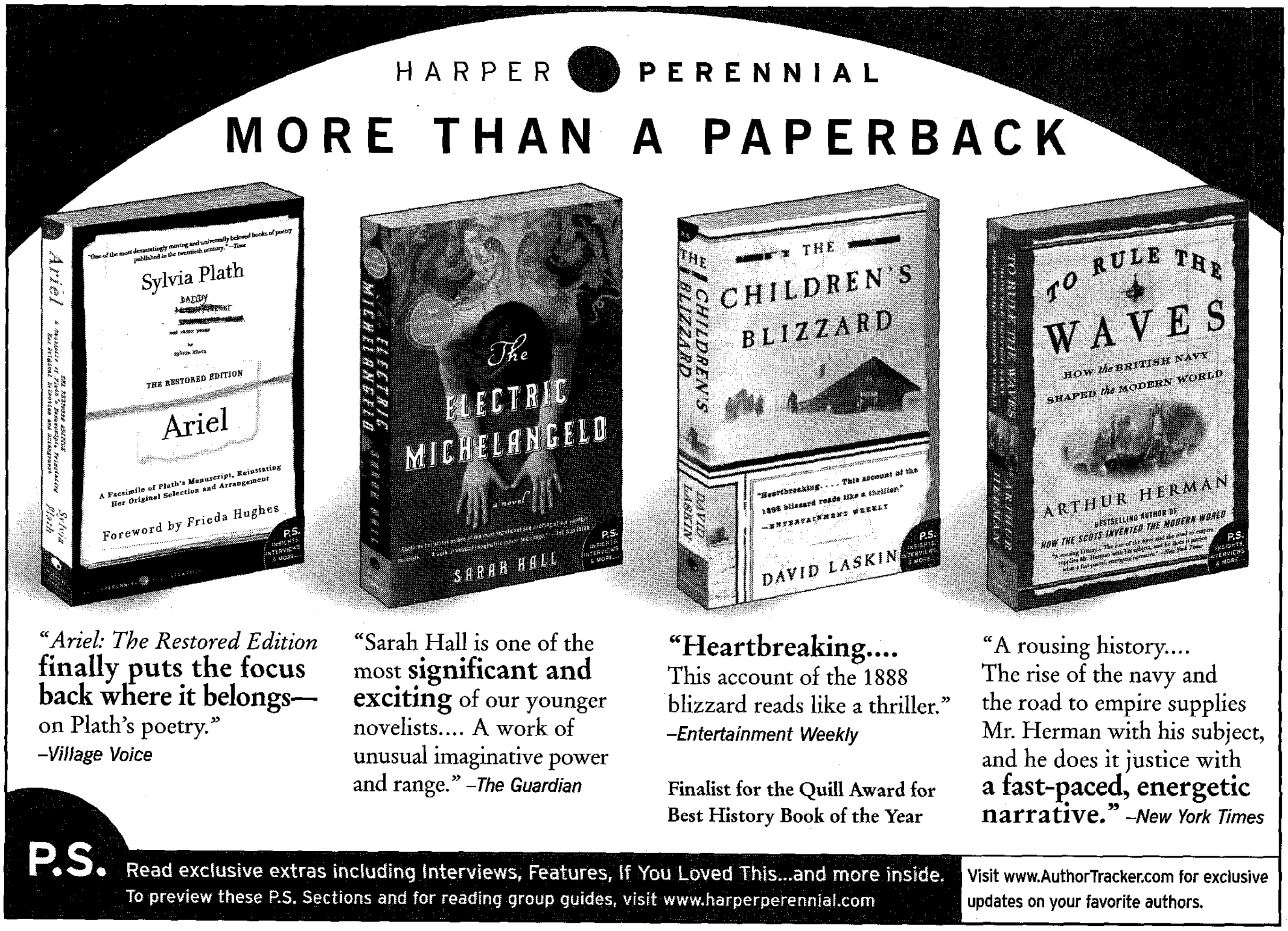
Lincoln's second collapse occurred in the winter of 1840 and 1841. During the 1840 Presidential campaign, he had stumped across Illinois for William Henry Harrison, a Virginia-born gentleman and military hero whom the Whigs, with stunning disingenuousness, were marketing as a folksy man of the people who would be at home in a log cabin drinking hard cider. While on the road, Lincoln corresponded with a young flirt named Mary Todd, who was considered a "violent little Whig" by her sisters. At some point, he began to feel that he was under an obligation to marry her. The campaign probably exhausted and demoralized him; Harrison lost Illinois, even though he won the Presidency. When Lincoln returned to Springfield, he discovered that he liked another woman more than Todd. He tried to break up with Todd but ended his interview with a kiss. The stress of the situation began to affect his work. In December, during a meeting of the Illinois legislature, he jumped out a second-story window in an unsuccessful attempt to deny the Democrats a quorum. (He wasn't hurt, and the Democrats joked that it was because the legs of the six-foot-four representative nearly reached to the ground.) In January of 1841, he missed roll-call votes for several days and then for a full week because he had, in the words of Mary Todd's brother-in-law, gone "Crazy as a *Loon*."

"I am now the most miserable man living," Lincoln wrote to his law partner John T. Stuart. Speed later claimed that friends had had to empty Lincoln's bedroom of knives and razors. Was the collapse caused by his unhappy sense of obligation to Todd? No one has been able to determine whether the breakdown took place before or after his rupture with her. As in the Rutledge case, Shenk sees in the disordered chronology the obscuring hand of depression. "In acknowledging that we don't know *when* this breakup happened, we soon see that we don't know *why*, either," Shenk writes. Maybe Lincoln's unhappiness with Todd led to his depression, or maybe the reverse. According to Shenk, depression suspends cause and effect ("However urgently we try to find clear narrative lines—*x* stress led to *y* reaction—the picture is never that clear"), a notion that seems somewhat at odds with the project of biography.

Late in life, Speed recalled that Lincoln had wished to die in 1841 but had lamented that he "had done nothing to make any human being remember that he had lived." In 1862, after issuing the Emancipation Proclamation, Lincoln reminded Speed of his youthful despair and said, "I believe in this measure my fondest hopes will be realized." But was Lincoln's career a response to the challenge of depression, or to that of life? There's a risk of trivializing Lincoln by placing the accent too heavily on the disease, as Shenk often does. Nor is Shenk persuasive in his claim that Lincoln's depression lasted into middle age. The mature Lincoln seems to have been canny and adaptable, thoroughly embroiled in the realities of other people, and Shenk sometimes fails to see this. He quotes, for example, a stanza that Lincoln wrote in the album of a hotelier's daughter in 1858 as evidence that Lincoln "saw the world as a sad, difficult place from which he expected considerable suffering":

> You are young, and I am older;
> You are hopeful, I am not—
> Enjoy life, ere it grow colder—
> Pluck the roses ere they rot.

The contrasts are stark, the tone is dour, and the world view is black—so unrelievedly so that a suspicious reader might wonder if it's deadpan. And, indeed, in



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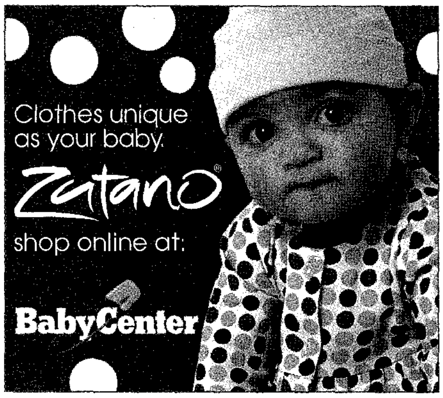

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a second stanza, which Shenk does not quote, the poem takes an abrupt turn:

> Teach your beau to heed the lay—
> That sunshine soon is lost in shade—
> That *now's* as good as any day—
> To take thee, Rosa, ere she fade.

Suddenly, Lincoln is a seducer in the style of Andrew Marvell's "To His Coy Mistress." Perhaps Mary was not altogether unjustified in her occasional jealous rages. The President could be sparky. In 1863, he ended a speech to some temperance advocates by thanking them "for bringing with you these very many pretty ladies."

In title and structure, Goodwin's "Team of Rivals" echoes the idea, popular among management consultants, that a company can preëmpt the natural selection of the marketplace by having its divisions compete against one another internally. Any project that survives boardroom feuding, the thinking goes, will dominate in the larger world. According to Goodwin, Lincoln executed something like this strategy when he appointed to his first Cabinet three men he had beaten for the 1860 Republican nomination: William H. Seward, Salmon P. Chase, and Edward Bates.

The remarkable thing about the 1860 Presidential race, in retrospect, is that so many people wanted the job of leading a country so obviously fissile. The Republicans looked likely to win, because the Democratic Party split and chose both a Northern and a Southern nominee. Within the Republican Party, Lincoln wasn't the candidate with the most pull; he merely had the lowest negatives. He hadn't said anything about slavery that sounded extremist, and had made few enemies in his own party. His strategy was "to give no offence to others—leave them in a mood to come to us, if they shall be compelled to give up their first love." First love being what it is, he won.

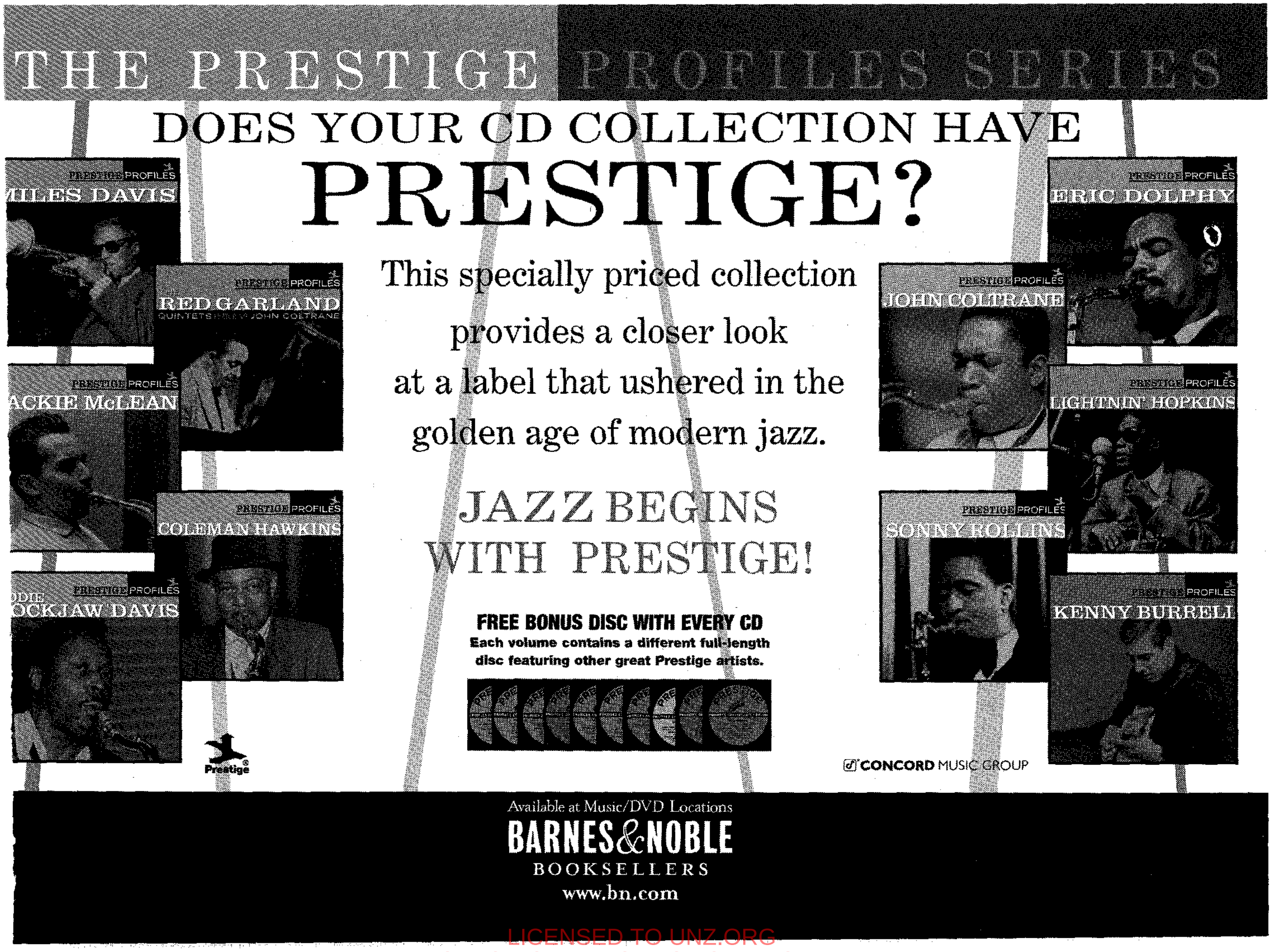
His choice of powerful rivals for his Cabinet was, Goodwin writes, "evidence of a profound self-confidence and a first indication of what would prove to others a most unexpected greatness." Few would have agreed with her at the time. "I never since I was born imagined that such a lot of poltroons & apes could be gathered together from the four quarters of the Globe," Francis Blair, Jr., the brother of one of the Cabinet's members, wrote in 1861. Seward tried to resign when he learned that Lincoln was appointing Chase, who wanted to confront the South much more aggressively than he did. Chase, for his part, was not sure that he wanted to join the Cabinet at all, and Lincoln sent his nomination to the Senate without consulting him, so as to embarrass him into accepting. David Herbert Donald, in a 1995 biography, gave the selection a mixed review. The President may have fostered "creative friction" deliberately, Donald acknowledged, but "the selection process ensured that the cabinet would never be harmonious or loyal." Lincoln himself seems not to have cared much about loyalty. "We needed the strongest men of the party in the Cabinet," he later explained. "I had no right to deprive the country of their services."

By adding Seward, Chase, and Bates to her book, Goodwin has delivered four biographies for the price of one. She and her team of researchers have processed masses of evidence, and they pile the quotes high and somewhat indiscriminately. Despite the broader context, Goodwin's account of political maneuverings in the Cabinet is not more insightful than Donald's. Her portraits of the supporting cast, however, are more vivid. Attorney General Bates was a homebody. Treasury Secretary Chase was a prig. The bearish War Secretary, Edwin Stanton, worked fifteen-hour days, roaring and snapping, and after his colleagues had gone home sobbed at his desk over the military necessity of shooting deserters. But the show stealer is Seward, whom Lincoln named Secretary of State—a short, big-nosed, industrious, and highly principled senator from New York, who was later responsible for the purchase of Alaska. If there hadn't been a Lincoln, it would probably have been Seward who carried America through the Civil War, and one feels, after reading Goodwin's book, that this would not have been so terrible.

Seward was famous for two pronouncements. Appalled by the Compromise of 1850, which renewed the constitutional obligation of Northern states to return runaway slaves to their owners, Seward declared that there was a "higher law" than the Constitution. In 1858, after the Supreme Court had ruled that the slave Dred Scott was not entitled to freedom, despite having lived as a slave in parts of the country where slavery was illegal, Seward warned that slavery and free labor were headed toward "an irrepressible conflict." Newspapers repeated the phrases "higher law" and "irrepressible conflict" endlessly, in the manner of Howard Dean's scream, and they probably cost Seward the Presidency. He became a symbol of extremism, even though he was not a disputatious person. On the contrary, he loved meeting voters and hosting dinner parties, and he was one of the few Cabinet members who could be relied on to laugh at Lincoln's jokes. When Lincoln shared a draft of his first Inaugural Address, Seward suggested a gentler closing and wrote out two sample paragraphs. Lincoln took one, and scholars often write about the exchange in order to show how sublimely Lincoln revised it. Goodwin instead emphasizes the sensitivity in Seward's recommendation. On the eve of war, Seward pushed the President to add "some words of affection—some of calm and cheerful confidence" to a speech otherwise quite stern.

In 1861, Seward's stature within the Republican Party was still very high, and he seems to have thought at first that he would be able to play Richelieu to Lincoln's Louis XIII. In March, he promised the South, on his own authority, that the government would surrender the federal garrison at Fort Sumter rather than risk war. Lincoln, however, sent supplies and men to sustain the fort. So flustered was Seward by the President's disregard of his advice that he wrote a wild memo, which accused Lincoln of having no foreign or domestic policy, and recommended that he warn Spain, France, Great Britain, and Russia against meddling in America's affairs, threatening them with war if need be. Lincoln wrote a sharp response, which he didn't send. (A number of Lincoln's letters were never sent; the politician in him seems to have been aware of the danger of his expressive powers, and to have regularly checked them.) Somehow, the two men made up. A month later, Seward wrote his wife that Lincoln's "magnanimity is almost superhuman." From then on, Lincoln had Seward's complete trust and even, Goodwin thinks, his "unconditional love." The night that Booth shot Lincoln, one of his collaborators stabbed Seward, and, while Seward was recovering, the news of the President's death was kept from him. The way he figured it out is heartbreaking. "If he had been alive he would have been the first to call on me," Seward said to his attendant one day as he gazed out the window, "but he has not been here, nor has he sent to know how I am, and there's the flag at half mast."

Chase was jealous of this intimacy and misunderstood it. In demeanor, the former governor of Ohio was the anti-Seward. He was more than six feet tall, his right eyelid drooped, and he had "a painful way of holding his head straight, which leads one to fancy that his shirt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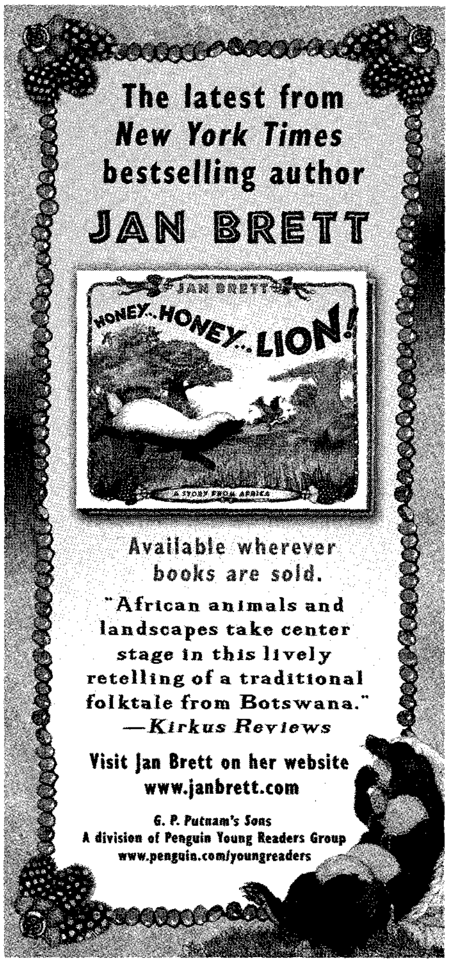
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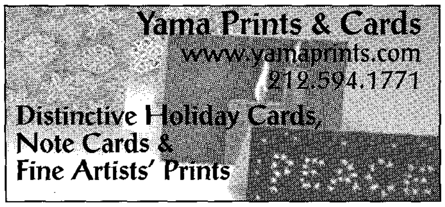
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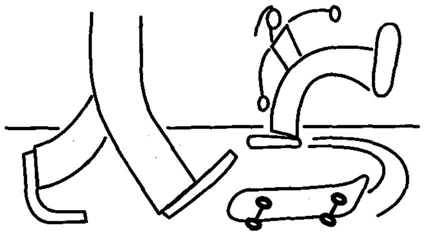
collar cuts his ears," according to a contemporary journalist. He needed glasses but was too vain to wear them. He had come to politics through abolition, and identified himself closely with the righteousness of the cause. He didn't smoke, didn't drink, and didn't go to the theatre. (Seward, in contrast, welcomed into his home Charlotte Cushman, an actress who was renowned for her performances as Romeo and whose longtime companions were women.) In Chase's eyes, Seward really was a Richelieu, and to allies in the Senate he bad-mouthed Seward as a "malign influence" who restrained Lincoln from fighting the war as vigorously as he should. After the Union defeat at Fredericksburg, in 1862, the Republicans were hungry for a scapegoat. Thanks to Chase's intrigue, a caucus of Republican senators drafted a resolution declaring a lack of confidence in Seward.

As soon as Seward heard, he sent Lincoln his resignation. Lincoln was puzzled, but, after a three-hour meeting with a few of the senators, he felt that he understood their complaint: "They seemed to think that when he [Lincoln] had in him any good purposes, Mr. S[eward] contrived to *suck them out of him unperceived*." To dispel the suspicion, Lincoln called a joint meeting of the senators and his Cabinet. Chase was cornered. In Lincoln's presence, he was obliged to tell the senators that there wasn't any malign influence in the Cabinet after all. The next morning, he offered his resignation to Lincoln, who grabbed it eagerly. "I can ride on now," he told a New York senator. "I've got a pumpkin in each end of my bag!" Once he had both men's resignation letters, he refused to accept either one, and sent the men identical letters saying so.

Unlike Seward, Chase never came to terms with Lincoln's authority. In 1864, he ran against Lincoln for the Republican Presidential nomination. Lincoln laughed the challenge off by telling a story about a lazy horse of his that out of the blue one day plowed vigorously ahead, because "an enormous chin-fly" had bitten it. When Lincoln brushed the fly away, a friend warned that he was making a mistake: "That's all that made him go." The Presidency was Chase's chin fly, and Lincoln sympathized: "No man knows what *that gnawing* is till he has had it." It wasn't until Chase's fourth resignation letter that Lincoln released him, and even then he held no grudge. He appointed him Chief Justice of the Supreme Court in December, 1864. "We cannot ask a man what he will do," Lincoln said to a Massachusetts congressman, "and if we should, and he should answer us, we should despise him for it. Therefore we must take a man whose opinions are known." Lincoln was confident that on such constitutional issues as the rights of African-Americans Chase was too stiff-necked to surprise him.

Chase never understood Lincoln's slyness—never appreciated that irony could have a moral edge, as in Lincoln's answer to a complaint about emancipation: "You say you will not fight to free negroes. Some of them seem willing to fight for you; but, no matter." In September of 1859, Lincoln mocked his Democratic rival Stephen Douglas's indifference to the outrage of slavery by describing the "peculiar structure" of his mind: "He is so put up by nature that a lash upon his back would hurt him, but a lash upon anybody else's back does not hurt him." In April, 1864, he said that the South's definition of liberty made him think of the way a wolf might seek to liberate a sheep from its shepherd. "The wolf's dictionary," he declared, "has been repudiated." The language of his humor is sharp and funny—and in deadly earnest. Chase didn't get it. "The truth is that I have never been able to make a joke out of this war," he told a friend when he left the Administration.

"I believe I have kept these discordant elements together as well as anyone could," Lincoln confided to a friend after the episode of the double resignations. That leaves open the question of whether such a divisive Cabinet was a good idea in the first place. After a while, the pettiness chronicled by Goodwin grows bewildering. Chase hated Seward. The Postmaster General, Montgomery Blair, hated both Chase and Stanton. The group seems to have been fairly dysfunctional. Several members complained that Lincoln consulted



them only after he had already made up his mind. When Lincoln convened the Cabinet in 1862 to read them the Emancipation Proclamation, Chase grumbled in his diary, "It has been so long since any consultation has been held that it struck me as a novelty." At that meeting, Seward usefully suggested that Lincoln delay the proclamation until after a Union victory, so that it wouldn't look like a desperate measure. Goodwin gives few other examples of dissent refining a proposal. The team of rivals, as such, might have been merely a distraction. There's some evidence that Lincoln thought so: his second-term Cabinet was amiable.

Lincoln's irony veils him from us. We see through it little better than Chase did. Lincoln said that he was reluctant to send soldiers convicted of cowardice to firing squads because "it would frighten the poor devils to death to shoot them," and we don't expect to find power vested in someone capable of such jokes. But Lincoln made them—he said that he would trade the Presidency for the talent to write better ones—and he commuted the death sentences of deserters when he could.

Equally hard for us to grasp is his radical humility. We don't expect a President to say that he is a man "without a name, perhaps without a reason why I should have a name," or to "confess plainly that events have controlled me" rather than the other way around. It isn't customary for a powerful man to treat himself so inconsiderately, and it had unexpected effects. When Lincoln toured liberated Virginia in 1865, freedmen hailed him as the Messiah. Has any other President had to stop people from kneeling to him as a god? Comparisons to Jesus were even more widespread after Lincoln's death. (He was shot on Good Friday, after all.) After he died, one of his secretaries called him "the greatest character since Christ," and Herndon wrote that many people had recognized in him "a man of sorrow"—an echo of a mystical name for Christ taken from the Book of Isaiah. But Lincoln was "not a technical Christian," to borrow his wife's careful phrasing, and even at his most Christ-like he had a way of not taking his moral authority seriously. The Emancipation Proclamation was probably the most moral blow ever struck by an individual in American political history, but he sometimes made it sound as if he had been concerned only with getting black bodies into blue uniforms. "It is not a question of sentiment or taste," he wrote in 1864, in one of his unsent letters, "but one of physical force, which may be measured, and estimated as horse-power and steam power, are measured and estimated." Nor did he act saintly. He didn't bother to visit his dying father. He told off-color jokes. In his youth, he probably visited prostitutes—Speed remembered him asking "where I can get *some*"—and he once feared that he had caught syphilis.

He was a sinner, and, if Herndon is to be believed, he had no hope of remedying his condition. "Lincoln maintained that God could not forgive; that punishment has to follow the sin," Herndon wrote in 1870. With his melancholy humor, Lincoln had some of Hamlet's antic disposition, but his favorite passage in Shakespeare's play was the soliloquy spoken by Hamlet's usurping uncle, Claudius, when he tries to pray for forgiveness and fails: "O, my offense is rank, it smells to heaven, / It hath the primal eldest curse upon't, / A brother's murder." One can imagine why, at the height of the Civil War, Lincoln found compelling Claudius's sense that he was damned for killing his brother. It was with a resignation like Claudius's that, in his second Inaugural Address, Lincoln accepted—seemed even to welcome—God's punishment of America for the sin of slavery. A couple of weeks after delivering it, however, he made light of it in a letter to a Republican strategist, saying that he didn't expect it to be "immediately popular," because "men are not flattered by being shown that there has been a difference of purpose between the Almighty and them." Shenk reports a popular joke about Lincoln: one old lady confides to another that she thinks the Confederates will win the war because their President, Jefferson Davis, prays. The second points out that Lincoln also prays. "Yes," replies the first, "but when Abraham prays, the Lord will think he's joking." If you pray for forgiveness with no hope of receiving it, is that what you're doing—joking? No wonder Lincoln remains hard to understand; he didn't take himself seriously. We have trouble imagining such liberty. ♦

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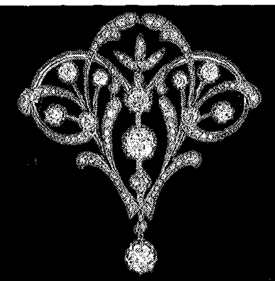

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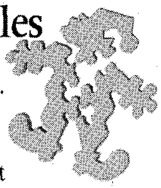

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Phyllis Schlafly and the conservative revolution.

BY ELIZABETH KOLBERT

On October 12, 1971, the United States House of Representatives approved the Equal Rights Amendment by a vote of 354 to 23. Five months later, the same amendment was passed by the Senate by a margin very nearly as lopsided—84 to 8—at which point the E.R.A. was sent on to the states for ratification. Several legislatures vied to be the first to approve it. (So eager was the Delaware state senate that it voted to ratify an hour and forty minutes before the amendment had technically been submitted.) Typical was the debate in Topeka, which took approximately ten minutes. The E.R.A. was supported by Presidents Richard Nixon, Gerald Ford, and Jimmy Carter, and actively lobbied for by the First Ladies Betty Ford and Rosalynn Carter. The A.F.L.-C.I.O., the League of Women Voters, and the National Education Association backed it; women's magazines ranging from *Redbook* and *Good Housekeeping* to *Cosmopolitan* ran scores of positive articles on it, and its many celebrity champions included Patty Duke, Ann Landers, Erma Bombeck, Marlo Thomas, and Carol Burnett, the last of whom once pleaded, "I have three daughters. Unless they're protected by the Constitution, what's going to happen to them?"

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Schlafly at a 1975 rally held at the Illinois capitol.

MICHAEL MAUNEY/TIME & LIFE PICTURES/GETTY IMAGES

Meanwhile, sitting in her living room in suburban St. Louis, Phyllis Schlafly had decided that the E.R.A. was a bad idea. Schlafly had no real organization to speak of, just a monthly newsletter that she mailed to a few thousand supporters, and it was there that she laid out her case against the amendment. American women, she wrote in the *Phyllis Schlafly Report*, were blessed to live in a country where Christian traditions of chivalry still held—"a man's first significant purchase (after a car) is a diamond for his bride"—and where free enterprise was continually improving life for the weaker sex. "The great heroes of women's liberation are not the straggly haired women on television talk shows and picket lines," she asserted, but "geniuses" like "Clarence Birdseye, who invented the process for freezing foods." Why, Schlafly demanded, should women "lower" themselves to equal rights "when we already have the status of special privilege?" Leaders of the pro-E.R.A. campaign found it hard to take such arguments seriously: according to one contemporary account, copies of the *Report* became collectors' items among feminists, acquired for their comic value.

The larger significance of events is, of course, often obscure to those busy living them out. Exactly what seemed most ridiculous about Schlafly in the early seventies—her antiquarian views, her screwball logic, her God's-on-our-side self-confidence—was by the end of the decade revealed to be her political strength. First the ratification process for the E.R.A. slowed, then it stalled out entirely. The last state to approve the amendment was Indiana, in January, 1977. Meanwhile, five states that had already voted to ratify rescinded their approval, a move of uncertain legal force but of ominous implications. As it became clear that the E.R.A. was going down, the tone of the Schlafly jokes began to sour.

"I just don't see why some people don't hit Phyllis Schlafly in the mouth," a well-known feminist lawyer, Florence Kennedy, told a Miami radio station.

"I'd like to burn you at the stake," Betty Friedan blurted out during a debate with Schlafly in Bloomington, Illinois. "I consider you a traitor to your sex. I consider you an Aunt Tom."

A new political biography, "Phyllis Schlafly and Grassroots Conservatism: A Woman's Crusade" (Princeton; $29.95), by Donald T. Critchlow, follows Schlafly from her birth to the present day—at eighty-one, she is still putting out the *Report*. Critchlow, a history professor at Saint Louis University, argues for the exemplarity of Schlafly's life, which, he claims, parallels the rise of American conservatism.

Schlafly was born into a family that, demographically speaking, should have been Democrats. Her parents, Bruce and Odile Stewart, were middle-class Catholics from St. Louis. When the Depression hit, Bruce, a sales engineer, lost his job, and for the next ten years the family got by on what Odile could earn, first as a salesclerk and later as a librarian. Through it all, the Stewarts remained politically anti-New Deal and socially admiring of old money. Phyllis was sent to Junior League dance classes and enrolled in the Academy of the Sacred Heart, an élite Catholic school where grades for deportment were given in French. (For the details of Schlafly's early life, Critchlow is heavily indebted to a popular biography, "The Sweetheart of the Silent Majority," written by Carol Felsenthal in 1981.) To make the private-school tuition, Odile had to work seven days a week.

At Sacred Heart, Phyllis received top honors every quarter except for one, a lapse that, she noted mournfully in a scrapbook, could be attributed to "the absence caused by my having the measles." Upon graduating, she received a full scholarship to a local Catholic college, but soon decided it wasn't challenging enough and enrolled in Washington University, in St. Louis. Schlafly graduated in three years, Phi Beta Kappa, went on to earn a master's degree in government from Radcliffe, and then worked for a year in Washington at the American Enterprise Association, the conservative think tank that later became the American Enterprise Institute. At twenty-five, she married Fred Schlafly, a lawyer fifteen years her senior. At twenty-six, she had her first child. (Five more followed.) The boy was not yet out of diapers when she decided to run for Congress.

The way Critchlow tells it, shortly after Christmas, 1951, the Schlaflys were visited by a group of local Republicans at odds with the Party establishment. (By this point, the family was living across the river from St. Louis, in Alton, Illinois.) The group wanted Fred to challenge the machine candidate for the Republican congressional nomination. Fred wasn't interested—"I am not your guy," he reportedly said—but his wife was. She threw herself into the campaign, firing off a barrage of daily press releases to the local papers, speaking before any group that would have her, and travelling from one end of the district to the other. Schlafly won the primary in an upset, and the morning after her victory she invited a photographer from the St. Louis *Globe-Democrat* into her kitchen, where she posed in a polka-dot apron, cooking eggs.

Schlafly's district—Illinois's Twenty-fourth—was heavily Democratic; her opponent, a five-term incumbent named Melvin Price, was a classically parochial congressman whose major interest was funnelling federal money back home. Breezily ignoring this fact, Schlafly portrayed him as a committed ideologue. When she wasn't attacking Price for championing "big government and big spending" and coddling Communist sympathizers—"The New Deal party was extremely slow in realizing the dangers of Communism, but my opponent, Melvin Price, was even slower than most of his party"—she was accusing the Truman Administration of treason. The Administration, she declared, handed over atom-bomb ingredients to the "Reds," passed around a drawing of the Oak Ridge National Laboratory, and practiced mind-control techniques copied from the Chinese. "Many government bureaus have developed extensive programs of brainwashing to push through socialized medicine and universal military training," she announced. Price won, as expected, but by the end of the campaign he was so livid he refused even to shake her hand.

After the election, Schlafly returned to private life, or at least to her version of it. She and her husband shared an obsession with the Communist menace and took to entertaining friends with after-dinner showings of films like "Operation Abolition," which portrayed students protesting the House Un-American Activities Committee as violence-prone radicals, and "Communism on the Map," which showed red ink slowly spreading across the globe until just a few countries, including Switzerland and the United States, remained. In the late fifties, they helped found a group, the Cardinal Mindszenty Foundation, whose goal was to organize Catholics to resist the threat. "The plain facts are that Communism is advancing over the surface of the globe with such rapidity that if it continues at the same rate for the next thirteen years that it has been advancing during the past thirteen years, America will be Communist by 1970," Schlafly predicted.

Schlafly's views soon brought her into conflict with her own party. In 1958, as a prelude to opening negotiations with the U.S.S.R. on a nuclear-

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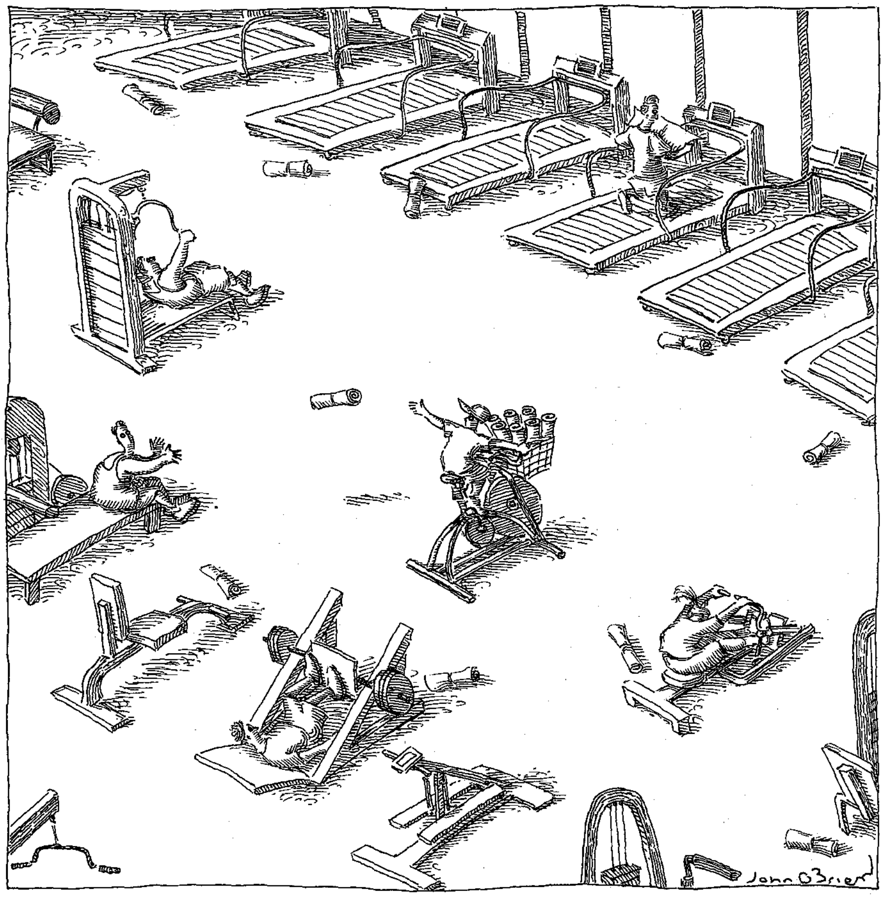

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test-ban treaty, President Eisenhower proposed a one-year testing moratorium. The move, Schlafly wrote, was clearly "a victory for appeasement-minded politicians," for an agreement with the Soviets "will not stop Red aggression any more than disarming our local police will stop murder, theft, and rape." The following year, she compiled a reading list, "Inside the Communist Conspiracy," designed to counter what she called an "American failure to grasp the fact that we are already engaged in a total war with the Communists." The Soviets' talk about "peaceful coexistence," she said, really meant that "they will take a peaceful gun, containing a peaceful bullet, and kill you peacefully."

When Eisenhower's Vice-President, Richard Nixon, won the 1960 Republican Presidential nomination, Schlafly was unenthusiastic. Her favored candidate was Senator Barry Goldwater, of Arizona, and to help him secure the 1964 nomination she composed a pocket-sized book titled "A Choice Not an Echo." (The title was taken from a phrase Goldwater had used in announcing his candidacy.) In inimitable Schlafly style, "A Choice Not an Echo" mixed fact, sensational accusations, common-sensical truths, and elaborate conspiracy theories into a compelling but evidently bogus narrative. The book purported to explain how Republican "kingmakers" had wheeled and dealed and, when necessary, bribed their way through every Convention from 1936 to 1960 in order to secure the nomination for a man who would faithfully carry out their "America Last" vision of foreign policy. (Why exactly the kingmakers were intent on undermining the United States was never specified.)

"The kingmakers have a vested interest in preventing—at all cost—the nomination of a candidate, such as Barry Goldwater, who will let the Soviet system collapse of its own internal weaknesses," Schlafly warned. It was up to "grassroots Republicans" to stop this nefarious scheme. Schlafly published the book at her own expense in April, 1964, and began mailing it out, gratis, to friends and fellow anti-Communist activists. Soon the orders started pouring in. Within a month, the book had supposedly sold more than half a million copies, and, within six months, more than three million.

To a remarkable extent, "A Choice Not an Echo" fulfilled Schlafly's goal. Ninety-three per cent of the delegates to the 1964 Republican Convention reported having read it, and twenty-six per cent said that they had been influenced by it. "A Choice Not an Echo" had heralded the Arizona senator as "the one Republican candidate on the horizon who can and will win." Nevertheless, in November, when Goldwater was trounced by Lyndon Johnson, Schlafly brushed aside suggestions that she was in any way to blame for the rout. Responsibility for the defeat, she insisted, lay with the liberal wing of the Party, which had refused to abide by the "grassroots" choice: "Like spoiled children, they took their marbles and went home."

According to her first biographer, Carol Felsenthal, it wasn't until the Equal Rights Amendment had already passed the House that Schlafly decided she was against it. She launched her crusade, STOP ERA, in the fall of 1972, and by the following spring the amendment had won thirty of the necessary thirty-eight state ratifications. Still, Schlafly was confident. "I knew from the start that I had found enough seriously wrong with E.R.A. to stop it, or at least stall it, for an awfully long time," she would later say.

STOP ERA—the acronym stood for Stop Taking Our Privileges—initially drew its support from the same network of conservative women who had helped Schlafly distribute "A Choice Not an Echo." Soon the movement began to grow, according to Critchlow, mainly by involving young women—a large proportion of them Evangelical Christians—who had never before been involved in politics. (When the Supreme Court handed down Roe v. Wade, in January, 1973, the battle over the E.R.A. quickly became entangled with the fight over abortion rights.) In surveys, a remarkable ninety-eight per cent of E.R.A. opponents claimed church membership, as compared with thirty-one per cent of E.R.A. supporters.

Schlafly served as the public face of STOP ERA and, just as significant, as the behind-the-scenes strategist. She organized "training conferences" where she instructed her followers on how to hold press conferences, run phone banks, and infiltrate pro-E.R.A. organizations. She advised STOP ERA members on everything from the best way to hold a fund-raiser—give a brunch, avoid serving alcohol—to the proper attire for a TV appearance: "Always wear a scarf around your neck even if you have a short neck." Schlafly herself was unfailingly well groomed and cheerful, even when taunting her opponents. One of her favorite tactics was to upstage pro-E.R.A. forces at their own rallies. Another was to perform satirical ditties, like this one, written shortly after *Playboy* donated five thousand dollars to a pro-E.R.A. group:

> Here comes Playboy cottontail
> Hopping down the bunny trail,
> Trying to buy votes for E.R.A.
> Telling every girl and boy,
> You can only have your joy,
> By becoming gender-free or gay.

"First of all, I want to thank my husband, Fred, for letting me come," Schlafly announced at a rally in Houston. "I always like to say that, because it makes the libs so mad."

Schlafly once said that the pro-E.R.A. movement had "sealed its own doom," and to a certain extent she was right. Feminist groups had fought off efforts to add a provision to the amendment that would have exempted women from the draft. Though it was unclear whether passage of the E.R.A. would have meant women could be sent into combat, advocates found themselves arguing that this would be a desirable outcome. (When Alan Alda, a vocal E.R.A. proponent, was asked whether he would support his daughters' being drafted, he answered emphatically "Yes," only to add that his daughters would be conscientious objectors.) Meanwhile, as the ratification battle dragged on, the nation's most prominent pro-E.R.A. group, the National Organization for Women, became increasingly associated with radical feminist politics. In a 1977 book, "The Power of the Positive Woman," Schlafly reprinted in its entirety one of the organization's pamphlets, "Revolution: Tomorrow Is

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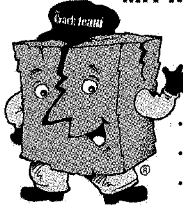

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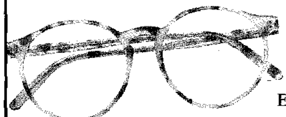

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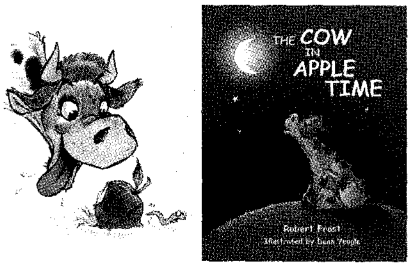
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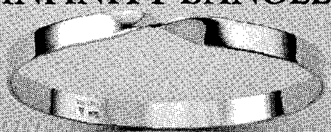

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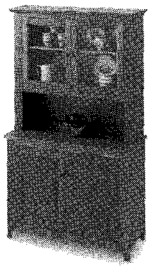

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NOW,” which proposed, among other things, “an end to militarism, narcissism and sexually stereotyped advertising” for children’s toys and a public veil-burning to “protest the second class status of women in all churches.”

E.R.A. supporters tried at every opportunity to point out the inconsistency of Schlafly’s position. Here was a woman who insisted that a woman’s greatest satisfaction lay in caring for her family—in 1973, Schlafly still had four children at home—yet spent most of her time politicking. (In the middle of the STOP ERA campaign, Schlafly stunned everyone, including her husband, by announcing that, on top of everything else, she was going to start law school; she received her law degree a few years later.) But Schlafly’s personal life could just as easily be taken as proof of what she was arguing: that women had no need for the E.R.A.

“I think what Phyllis is doing is absolutely dreadful,” Karen DeCrow, who was the president of NOW in the mid-seventies, once said. “But I just can’t think of anyone who’s so together and tough. I mean, everything you should raise your daughter to be.... She’s an extremely liberated woman.”

Accounts of the resurgence of the right tend to come in one of two varieties. There are the sort that credit think tanks like the Heritage Foundation and intellectuals like Friedrich Hayek and Leo Strauss with rehabilitating conservative ideas. And then there are those which construe the right’s triumph as a more haphazard affair—the result of alliances made primarily for pragmatic reasons. By this latter account, it isn’t the coherence of conservative ideology that matters but just the opposite—the movement was so loosely conceived that it could accommodate libertarians and religious fundamentalists, pro-gun lobbyists and pro-lifers.

“Phyllis Schlafly and Grassroots Conservatism” takes the second approach, and it’s easy to see why. Schlafly’s defeat of the E.R.A. may have been a victory for the right, but it clearly didn’t follow from a lot of intellectual heavy-lifting. (By Schlafly’s own reckoning, her sex precluded this: women, she once wrote, “don’t take naturally to a search for the intangible and the abstract.”) In the nineteen-sixties, the enemy was Khrushchev; in the seventies, it was Carol Burnett. Schlafly never really explained this turn in her political life, and she didn’t seem to feel that any explanation was required.

But while she may not have been consistent in her choice of targets, Schlafly was unwavering in her characterization of them. Starting with Melvin Price, back in 1952, her opponents have invariably been not just wrong or misguided but downright evil. From the Communists and “perverts” who infiltrated the State Department to the Republican kingmakers, who used “hidden persuaders and psychological warfare techniques,” and the “women’s libbers,” who placed “their agents and sympathizers in the media and the educational system,” Schlafly’s foes have always aimed at nothing less than the destruction of “civilization as we know it.” Anyone who failed to see this just didn’t understand how the world really works. (On the long, long list of those whom Schlafly charged with colluding in the “preemptive surrender” of the United States to the Soviets were Robert McNamara, Paul Nitze, and Henry Kissinger.) Whether Schlafly’s paranoia represents actual delusion or just a rhetorical posture is hard to say. Even at its most despairing, her writing has a gleefulness that makes the reader feel she’s having fun.

One consequence—quite possibly intentional—of Schlafly’s accusations has been to induce in her antagonists a kind of like-minded hysteria. They have, over the years, charged Schlafly with everything from racism to child neglect, and have suggested, with surprising frequency, that her premature death would not be unwelcome. “If Phyllis Schlafly walked into the headlights of my car, I would knock her into the next time zone,” one E.R.A. activist announced on national TV. In the end, Schlafly’s denunciatory tone, more than any of her actual campaigns, probably represents her most lasting contribution to American life. While Ann Coulter and Laura Ingraham were still playing tea party, she recognized that deliberation was no match for diatribe, and logic no equal to contempt. She was, in this way, a woman ahead of her time. ◆

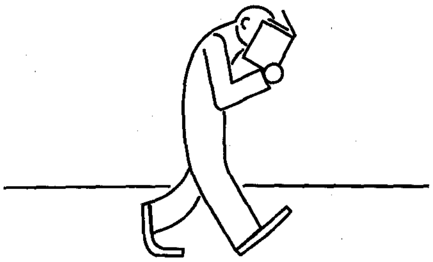
BRIEFLY NOTED

13 Steps Down, *by Ruth Rendell (Crown; $25).* The British crime novelist Ruth Rendell is the author of fifty-odd books in which things go horribly, intricately wrong. (Her creepiest, most disturbing novels are written under the pseudonym Barbara Vine.) In her latest, a fitness-machine repairman's dual fixations—on a famous Notting Hill serial killer, hanged half a century before, and on a young black model in thrall to a soothsayer—collide. The novel lacks the modifying, likable intelligence that Rendell's recurrent character, Chief Inspector Wexford, brings to other of her works, and the result is a wan puzzler painted in broad strokes. However, her portrait of the repairman's landlady—a Miss Havisham among her scruffy bits and bobs, who reads Darwin and seems to take a dim view of the evolution of man post-1900—has the zany, wry touch of a master.

Pigtopia, *by Kitty Fitzgerald (Miramax; $22.95).* The center of this novel is Jack Plum, a thirty-something suffering from macrocephaly, which leaves him isolated and feeling like a monster. His alcoholic mother, with whom he lives, blames him for her troubles and for his father's departure. To escape from the insults and abuse heaped on him by his mother and the townspeople—he's particularly persecuted by a group of young boys—Jack spends most of his time in a "pig palace" in his basement, where he keeps a herd of the animals that his father taught him to love. The narration alternates between Jack and his friend Holly, a girl struggling with puberty and her mother's new boyfriend. Holly has a conventional voice that tends to point up the more trite and facile elements of the plot, but Jack's wisely naïve insights give the story a fairy-tale charm.

Storm Chasers, *by Paul Quarrington (St. Martin's; $23.95).* In this swift, tightly plotted novel, a fictional splinter of land in the Caribbean acts as a magnet for storm-obsessed weather chasers when it appears that the island will be the epicenter of a hurricane. Each arrives independently, with emotional baggage so weighty that it tips the scales toward black comedy: the father of one eviscerated her mother with a kitchen knife; the family of another was wiped out in a road accident the day he won the lottery. Quarrington is interested in how extreme emotional storms seek out congruent atmospheric disturbance, and it's a relief, in these chaotic pages, to encounter Maywell Hope, a character whose pirate ancestors discovered the island, whose reading matter consists solely of antique travelogues, and who, having left the island only twice, stays almost completely still.

Defining the World, *by Henry Hitchings (Farrar, Straus & Giroux; $24).* James Boswell's biography has preserved for the ages the reputation of Samuel Johnson, but the dictionary for which Johnson was known in his own time receives little attention therein, because Boswell did not meet Johnson until 1763, eight years after the dictionary's publication. Hitchings' sprightly book about the dictionary gives a full picture of Johnson during a difficult decade of melancholy toil. More than twenty English dictionaries preceded Johnson's, but his surpassed them all, and was itself supplanted only in 1928, by the first Oxford English Dictionary—which used nearly two thousand of Johnson's definitions. In alphabetically ordered chapters given Johnson's own headwords, from "Adventurous" to "Zootomy," Hitchings details the magnitude of Johnson's labors and the achievements of the dictionary, from Johnson's "scrupulous care over shades of meaning"—defining "world," for example, in sixteen different senses—to the inclusion of a hundred thousand illustrative quotations, culled from his voracious reading.



Melville, *by Andrew Delbanco (Knopf; $30).* Delbanco, a professor of American studies at Columbia, attempts to place Herman Melville and his work in the context of his time—no easy task, since Melville, after the early success of his South Seas adventures "Typee" and "Omoo," was regarded by most of his contemporaries as a freakish failure. "Moby-Dick" was widely panned, and a review of his next novel, "Pierre," was headlined "HERMAN MELVILLE CRAZY." His own publishers suspected that he was going mad, and "Billy Budd" remained unpublished for thirty-three years after his death. Delbanco writes about Melville with a sympathy and passion that illuminate both his sad life and the more obscure corners of his writings. "Benito Cereno" gives perspective on the war on terror; and the much maligned "Pierre" is a "preview of the camp sensibility." Melville's very "dissonance in his own time," Delbanco writes, makes him seem at home in ours.

A Man with No Talents, *by Oyama Shiro, translated from the Japanese by Edward Fowler (Cornell; $21).* A failed salaryman, Oyama (a pseudonym) abandoned the corporate world at the age of forty and retreated to the Tokyo slum of San'ya, "where someone lacking any vitality whatsoever could go about the business of accommodating his own fecklessness and ill luck." There he scrounged for day labor and bunked in flophouses with eight men to a room, all the while seeking to minimize contact with other people, to the point of renouncing sex ("Any deficiencies in my sex life are a small price to pay for the pleasure of living apart from my fellow man"). "I am truly devoid of all virtue," he informs us. This is neither a boast nor a bid for sympathy; although Oyama's dim view of himself and others recalls the rantings of Dostoyevsky's Underground Man, his tone is resigned, even serene. This meditative memoir won a literary prize in Japan; since then, Oyama reports in an epilogue, he has left San'ya to live on the streets, scraping by with the award money from his book and looking forward to the "thrill" of one day scavenging for food.

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BOOKS

DYING FOR LOVE

A new novel by García Márquez.

BY JOHN UPDIKE

The works of Gabriel García Márquez contain a great deal of love, depicted as a doom, a demonic possession, a disease that, once contracted, cannot be easily cured. Not infrequently the afflicted are an older man and a younger woman, hardly more than a child. In "One Hundred Years of Solitude" (1967; English translation 1970), Aureliano Buendía visits a very young whore:

> The adolescent mulatto girl, with her small bitch's teats, was naked on the bed. Before Aureliano sixty-three men had passed through the room that night. From being used so much, kneaded with sweat and sighs, the air in the room had begun to turn to mud. The girl took off the soaked sheet and asked Aureliano to hold it by one side. It was as heavy as a piece of canvas. They squeezed it, twisting it at the ends until it regained its natural weight. They turned over the mat and the sweat came out of the other side. Aureliano was anxious for that operation never to end.

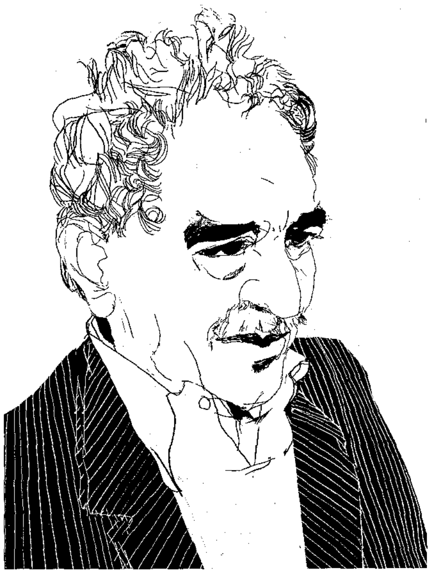
Her condition is pitiable:

> Her back was raw. Her skin was stuck to her ribs and her breathing was forced because of an immeasurable exhaustion. Two years before, far away from there, she had fallen asleep without putting out the candle and had awakened surrounded by flames. The house where she lived with the grandmother who had raised her was reduced to ashes. Since then her grandmother carried her from town to town, putting her to bed for twenty cents in order to make up the value of the burned house. According to the girl's calculations, she still had ten years of seventy men per night, because she also had to pay the expenses of the trip and food for both of them.

Aureliano does not take advantage of her overexploited charms, and leaves the room "troubled by a desire to weep." He has—you guessed it—fallen in love:

> He felt an irresistible need to love her and protect her. At dawn, worn out by insomnia and fever, he made the calm decision to marry her in order to free her from the despotism of her grandmother and to enjoy all the nights of satisfaction that she would give the seventy men.

This curious blend of the squalid and the enchanted—perhaps not so curious in the social context of the author's native Colombia in the years of his youth—returns, five years later, in the long short story "The Incredible and Sad Tale of Innocent Eréndira and Her Heartless Grandmother" (translated 1978), which was made into a movie from a script by the author. The situation has become more fabulous, with its Catholic subtext—whoredom as the martyrdom of an innocent—underlined; Eréndira's would-be rescuer is Ulises, "a gilded adolescent with lonely maritime eyes and with the appearance of a furtive angel," and her grandmother is fully demonic, huge in bulk, with "mercilessly tattooed" shoulders and, it turns out, green blood, "oily blood, shiny and green, just like mint honey."



Gabriel García Márquez

RICCARDO VECCHIO

Eréndira, when we first meet her, has "just turned fourteen," whereas Sierva María de Todos los Ángeles, the heroine of García Márquez's uncanny short historical novel "Of Love and Other Demons" (1994; translated 1995), turns twelve as the book opens. Her mother is "an untamed mestiza of the so-called shopkeeper aristocracy: seductive, rapacious, brazen, with a hunger in her womb that could have satisfied an entire barracks." Her father, the second Marquis de Casalduero, is a "funereal, effeminate man, as pale as a lily because the bats drained his blood while he slept." Neither parent has any energy or affection to spare the child, so she is reared by the decaying household's contingent of slaves, and learns their languages, dances, religion, and diet—a goat's eyes and testicles are her favorite meal, "cooked in lard and seasoned with burning spices." Her most striking physical feature is her radiant copper hair; it has never been cut and is braided into loops so as not to interfere with her walking.

On her birthday, she is bitten by a rabid dog, and though she never develops symptoms, the medical precautions, and her own charisma, prove to be fatal. Her father, roused to notice her existence, falls in love with her, suddenly "knowing he loved her as he had never loved in this world," and so does the devout and learned thirty-six-year-old priest, Cayetano Delaura, who is placed in charge of the exorcism that the Church has deemed necessary, in view of her willful and feral behavior. Delaura at last proclaims his love to her: "He confessed that every moment was filled with thoughts of her, that everything he ate and drank tasted of her, that she was his life, always and everywhere, as only God had the right and power to be, and that the supreme joy of his heart would be to die with her." Denis de Rougemont's analysis of romantic love as a Catholic heresy could scarcely be better illustrated. As García Márquez frames these cases, an element of whoredom is necessary to the, in Stendhal's term, "crystallization" of love.

Sordid imputations swirl about the pre-teen Sierva María. Condemned to a convent, she shows up in a hat, found in an old chest and gaily decorated with ribbons; the abbess, in her perpetual puritan fury, calls it "the hat of a slut." Rumors of Delaura's attentions in her convent cell cause the child to be called "his pregnant whore." The pair do embrace, and even begin to experience, through daily exposure, "the tedium of everyday love," but she remains a virgin, in hopes of an eventual marriage. Nevertheless, there is no doubt that she has the talent that the physician and seer Abrenuncio names when he says, "Sex is a talent, and I do not have it." For all of Delaura's vows, it is Sierva María who stops eating and dies for love. Her hair tells the tale: the nuns shave it off, but when she is found dead "strands of hair gushed like bubbles as they grew back on her shaved head," and two hundred years later "a stream of living hair the intense color of copper" flows from her crypt, to the length of twenty-two metres. The miracle was witnessed, it is explained in a foreword, by the twenty-one-year-old journalist Gabriel García Márquez.

His new novel, "Memories of My Melancholy Whores" (translated from the Spanish by Edith Grossman; Knopf; $20), is his first work of fiction in ten years, and a mere hundred and fifteen pages long. It revisits the figure of a young whore, "just turned fourteen," stretched naked on a soaked bed. The moisture, this time, is her own "phosphorescent perspiration," and her lover, our unnamed protagonist and narrator, is all of ninety years old. García Márquez, a master of the arresting first sentence, begins his little book, "The year I turned ninety, I wanted to give myself the gift of a night of wild love with an adolescent virgin." Though the author was born in 1927 and is thus still shy of eighty, many homey details seem lifted from within his own study. The hero is a writer, having for fifty years composed a column, "El Diario de La Paz," for the local newspaper; he reads and cites books, favoring the Roman classics, and keeps a collection of dictionaries; he listens carefully to classical music, and supplies the titles of his selections. The city he lives in is, as he is, unnamed, but its location, "twenty leagues distant" from the estuary of the Great Magdalena River, puts it in the neighborhood of García Márquez's native town of Aracataca. As for the time of the action, the narrator gives his age as thirty-two when his father dies, "on the day the treaty of Neerlandia was signed, putting an end to the War of the Thousand Days"; that would be 1902, so our hero would have been born in 1870 and aged ninety in 1960. He tells us that he is "ugly, shy, and anachronistic," and has "never gone to bed with a woman I didn't pay." A retired prostitute whom he meets on a bus refers to, perhaps in a reflex of professional flattery, "that burro's cock the devil gave you as a reward for cowardice and stinginess." He has never married and keeps no pets; a faithful servant, the "Indianlike,

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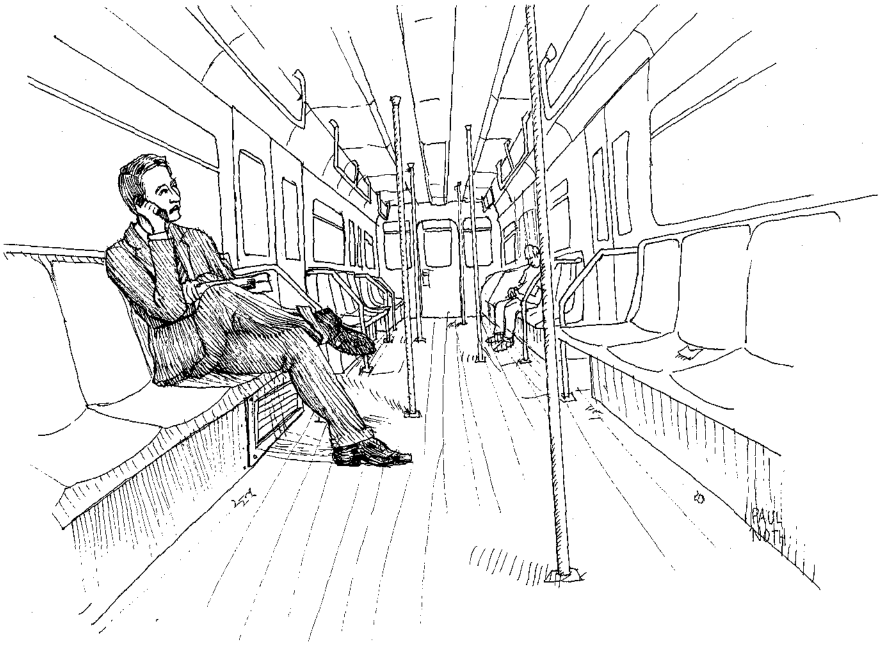
strong, rustic" Damiana, tends to his modest needs, moving about barefoot so as not to disturb his writing. Though impecunious, he attends many cultural events and knows the trials of fame: strangers approach him "with a frightening look of pitiless admiration." His prose displays, in Edith Grossman's expert translation, the chiselled stateliness and colorful felicities that distinguish everything García Márquez composes. "Memories of My Melancholy Whores," reminiscent in its terseness of such stoic fellow-Latins as the Brazilian Machado de Assis and the Colombia-born Álvaro Mutis, is a velvety pleasure to read, though somewhat disagreeable to contemplate; it has the necrophiliac tendencies of the precocious short stories, obsessed with living death, that García Márquez published in his early twenties.

The virgin whom the veteran brothel madam Rosa Cabarcas provides for her old client is a poor girl who lives with her crippled mother and feeds her brothers and sisters by a daily stint of sewing on buttons in a clothing factory. She is, Rosa Cabarcas confides, "dying of fear," because a friend of hers bled to death in losing her virginity. To quiet her nerves, she has been given a mixture of bromide and valerian that relaxes her so soundly that our hero's night with her consists of his watching her sleep:

> Her newborn breasts still seemed like a boy's, but they appeared full to bursting with a secret energy that was ready to explode. The best part of her body were her large, silent-stepping feet with toes as long and sensitive as fingers. . . . The adornments and cosmetics could not hide her character: the haughty nose, heavy eyebrows, intense lips. I thought: A tender young fighting bull.

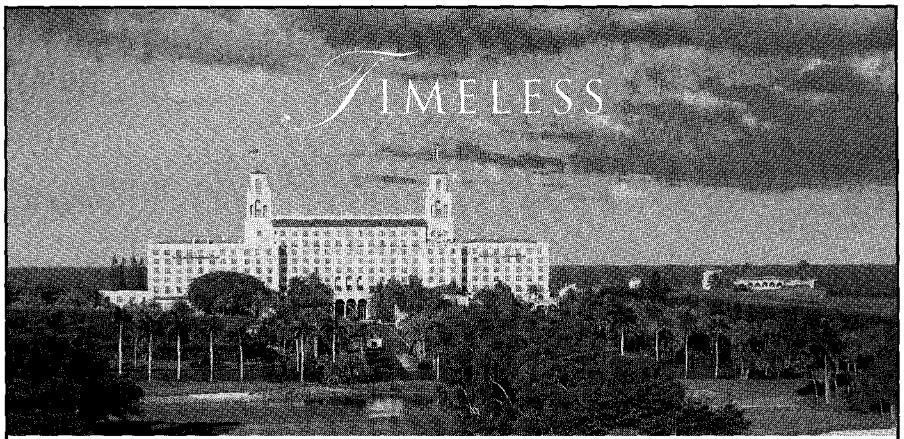
His subsequent visits follow the same pattern: she, drugged and exhausted by overwork, sleeps while the ninety-year-old lies beside her, eavesdropping upon her breathing, at one point so faint that he takes her pulse to reassure himself that she is still alive. He imagines her blood as it circulates "through her veins with the fluidity of a song that branched off into the most hidden areas of her body and returned to her heart, purified by love." Whose love? Presumably his, directed toward an inert love object. He reads and sings to her, all in her sleep. Not once do we see her wake, or hear her talk, though the happy ending reports that she has feelings and awareness. His relationship, insofar as the action holds any, is with Rosa Cabarcas and those others who witnessed his whore-crazy prime, when he "was twice crowned client of the year." Sleeping Beauty needs only to keep sleeping; her beauty under the male gaze is her raison d'être, and what she does when kissed awake is off the record, as is the cruelty of the economic system that turns young females into fair game for sexual predators. The narrator does not deplore the grim underpinnings of whoredom, or consider the atavistic bar-



"Can I get back to you when there's someone to overhear me?"

barism of buying girls in order to crack their hymens. Such moral concerns are irrelevant to the rapture that is his basic subject—the rebirth of love and its torments in a body that he had thought was "free at last of a servitude that had kept me enslaved since the age of thirteen." He reassures the reader, "I would not have traded the delights of my suffering for anything in the world." He is, at ninety, alive, with love's pain to prove it.

"Memories of My Melancholy Whores" feels less about love than about age and illness. Furtively vivid images give us whiffs of the underlying distress: "My heart filled with an acidic foam that interfered with my breathing"; "I'd rather die first, I said, my saliva icy." The narrator's asshole, we are told more than once, burns. His sense of reality keeps slipping, as it does with old people, sometimes into a startling loveliness: "The full moon was climbing to the middle of the sky and the world looked as if it were submerged in green water." Magic realism has always depended on the subaqueous refractions of memory. So does love: "From then on I had her in my memory with so much clarity that I could do what I wanted with her. . . . Seeing and touching her in the flesh, she seemed less real to me than in my memory." As both de Rougemont and Freud (in 1912's essay "The Most Prevalent Form of Degradation in Erotic Life") suggest, the woman present in the flesh, the wife or surrogate mother with her complicated, obdurate reality and pressing needs, is less aphrodisiac than the woman, imagined or hired, whose will is our own. In "Of Love and Other Demons," this phantom appears as a forlorn little princess, a wild and enigmatic waif. In "Memories of My Melancholy Whores," she is a working-class cipher who surrenders in her sleep, and whose speechless body represents the marvel of life. The instinct to memorialize one's loves is not peculiar to nonagenarian rakes; in the slow ruin of life, such memory reverses the current for a moment and silences the voice that murmurs in our narrator's ear, "No matter what you do, this year or in the next hundred, you will be dead forever." The septuagenarian Gabriel García Márquez, while he is still alive, has composed, with his usual sensual gravity and Olympian humor, a love letter to the dying light. ♦



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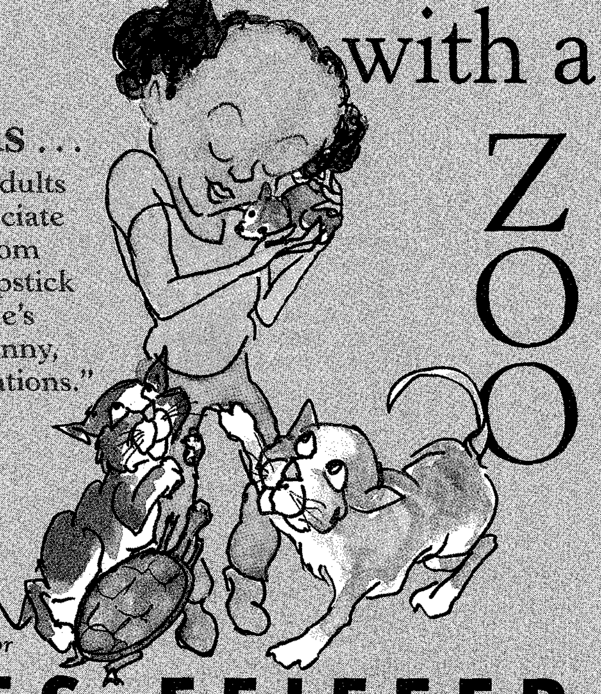

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THE THEATRE

REVERSAL OF FORTUNE

A new "Odd Couple" and an old formula.

BY JOHN LAHR

"The Odd Couple" (in revival at the Brooks Atkinson, under the direction of Joe Mantello) is Neil Simon's enduring masterpiece, a textbook on comic construction, as streamlined and solid as the Pyramids. The curtain rises on a poker table, where one of four players is glowering incredulously at another, who is dealing very slowly. "Tell me, Mr. Maverick, is this your first time on the riverboat?" he says. The opening line tells us what the evening will be about: we're going to be reacting to behavior—all of it more or less bad. The card-game badinage also gives us some time to soak up the rank, smoke-filled atmosphere of the eight-room Upper West Side pigsty where the game is taking place—a sump of spectacular dereliction that is the natural habitat of a divorced sportswriter named Oscar Madison (Nathan Lane), who is currently in the kitchen whipping something up for the boys. Even before Oscar makes his entrance with a tray of vittles ("I got brown sandwiches and green sandwiches"), the audience knows the place, the person, and the problem: the sixth player, Felix Ungar (Matthew Broderick), is missing from the game. (He's gone walkabout because his marriage has collapsed.) The stage is set, so to speak, and the rest is comic gravy. But even gravy requires some attention. In this revival, surprisingly, Simon's feast loses some of its flavor. The problem, as always with cooking, comes down to chemistry.

Lane and Broderick, who were box-office magic as a comic duo in the musical "The Producers," were hired, reportedly at about a hundred thousand dollars a week each, to reprise the roles that were originated by Walter Matthau and Art Carney in 1965. From a commercial standpoint, since the limited engagement is already virtually sold out, the tandem's magic has worked. From an artistic one, however, Lane and Broderick can't claim the same victory. There's something essentially wrong in their casting, and it skews the play. The actors hit Simon's notes, but they don't quite capture the music of his humor.

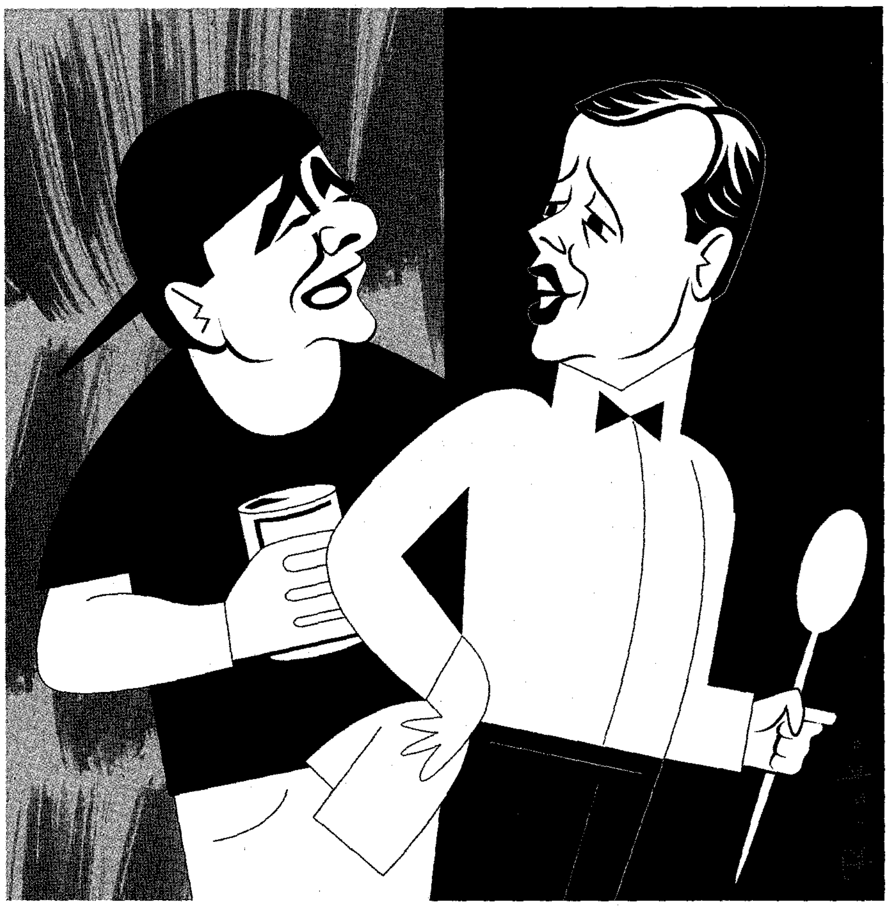
The Oscar Madison described in the script is at ease in his body, the quintessence of loosey-goosey. "He seems to enjoy life to the fullest. . . . His carefree attitude is evident in the sloppiness of his household," the stage directions read. Lane, however, is not at ease in his body; his nerviness is part of his campy comic appeal. You can put him in sneakers, flip his Mets cap backward, and drape his portly body in an unbuttoned shirt, but, no matter how you alibi it, Lane still has the metabolism of a hamster. He is at home with the frenetic, not the athletic. (Although he picks up a basketball in one scene, you can tell from the way he handles it that he hasn't a clue what to do with it.) Inevitably, Lane is at his best when Oscar's infantile high dudgeon matches his own high-strung pitch. In the script's brilliant comic symmetry, Oscar and Felix, roommates forced together by matrimonial disaster only to become stand-ins for each other's former wives, end up acting out the very behavior that made them single. At one point in Act II, as Felix sits eating a neatly prepared plate of pasta, Lane's Oscar pointedly wipes his nose on the curtain, marches up and down on the sofa, tosses his cigar wrapper onto the carpet, and finally tells Felix to take the spaghetti and get out of his sight. "It's not spaghetti," Felix says. "It's linguine!" Oscar picks up the plate and heaves it into the kitchen. "Now it's garbage!" he says.

The nervous alertness that rightly belongs to the meticulous Felix has been usurped by Lane's snappy, Energizer Bunny performance, and Broderick has no choice but to play against the attack of his co-star. Here, Felix becomes the laid-back character—so laid-back, in fact, that he seems at times almost absent. Broderick's Felix is a round-shouldered, flatvoiced milquetoast, a depressed schlub who pads around the apartment like Jeeves with a towel over his arm, rather than the fussing, passive-aggressive "wife" we're expecting. The lack of animus in Broderick's sedate approach somehow lowers the heat in the argument and takes some of the lustre off the humor. Still, it doesn't stop him from getting his share of laughs. In one scene, with the table laid for a fine meal that Felix has spent the afternoon preparing, Oscar breezes in. "I'm home, dear," he jokes, then kvells about the table settings. Felix comes out of the kitchen. "If you knew you were going to be late," he says, "why didn't you call me?"

Every syllable of the pitch-perfect dialogue in "The Odd Couple"—which was developed by Simon, in collaboration with his original director, Mike Nichols, who gets a share of the royalties—emerges out of cunningly shaped events. The absence of event is what scuppers Wendy Wasserstein's genial but aimless new play, "Third" (at the Mitzi E. Newhouse, directed by Daniel Sullivan). The title is a reference to the nickname of the charming Woodson Bull III (Jason Ritter), a Groton-educated wrestling star who finds himself at a prestigious New England college, in the literature class of a legendary, iconoclastic professor named Laurie Jameson (the admirable Dianne Wiest). From her opening lecture on "King Lear" ("Goneril and Regan were right! Lear was an old, foolish, narcissistic man whose personal tragedy is overrated, and the good daughter, Cordelia, was a masochistic simp"), it's clear that Jameson has a left-wing agenda. Although she declares her classroom "a hegemonic-free zone," when Third has the temerity to disagree with her interpretation she pigeonholes him as "a walking red state" and a preppy wastrel. Third writes a compelling paper on Lear, but Jameson's idée fixe of him prevents her from acknowledging his originality. Instead, she accuses him of plagiarism. This is the central event of the play, but Jameson provides no proof for her claim, and Wasserstein provides no real drama, other than Third's eloquent soliloquy in his own defense. Although he's eventually cleared of the accusation, Third loses his scholarship, his place on the wrestling team, and his desire to remain at the college. Jameson has derailed the boy's life, and, until the arbitrary finale, she doesn't address the psychological fallout of her actions.

The play seems to suggest that the academic blowup is actually a mask for other issues, perhaps even sexual ones. Jameson rants about safe targets such as Lear and President Bush and the war in Iraq, but she is entirely out of touch with her anger over the losing battles she's waging at home—with her husband's detachment, her elder daughter's bisexuality, her younger daughter's disenchantment with academia, her father's descent into the no man's land of Alzheimer's, and the likely death of a close friend from cancer. Wasserstein's commercial formula requires her protagonist to overcome a lifetime of denial by the end of the play. At the finale, Jameson bestows on the wronged student her own academic honor; he bestows on her the gift of forgiveness. Jameson may be blinkered by her agenda, but so is Wasserstein, whose characters live onstage as illustrations, not as people.

Although "Third" rolls along like a car in neutral, arriving at its destination without ever picking up momentum, it is given a couple of hefty pushes by the veteran Charles Durning, who plays Jameson's fretful and forgetful father. Durning is now in his eighties. His skin is pale, his voice is feathery, his stomach precedes him by a foot or so, and he waddles when he walks. His heavy-lidded eyes have a faraway look, as if he were seeing something vast and awesome that we can't quite glimpse. In the play, alternately roaring and apologizing, he represents a sort of simulacrum of Lear. When his daughter finds him wandering alone on a stormy night, he doesn't recognize her, and he asks her to dance. "I know I just met you, but I don't know how many more dances I have left," he says. Then, speak-singing a few bars of Benny Goodman's "Moonglow," he deftly maneuvers her offstage. The moment gets applause, but not for any sentimental reason. Durning transcends the play; he achieves without words what Wasserstein, for all her articulacy, doesn't. In his grace and his grief, he tells us everything about where we've been and where we're going. ♦



Nathan Lane and Matthew Broderick are Broadway's perennial odd couple.

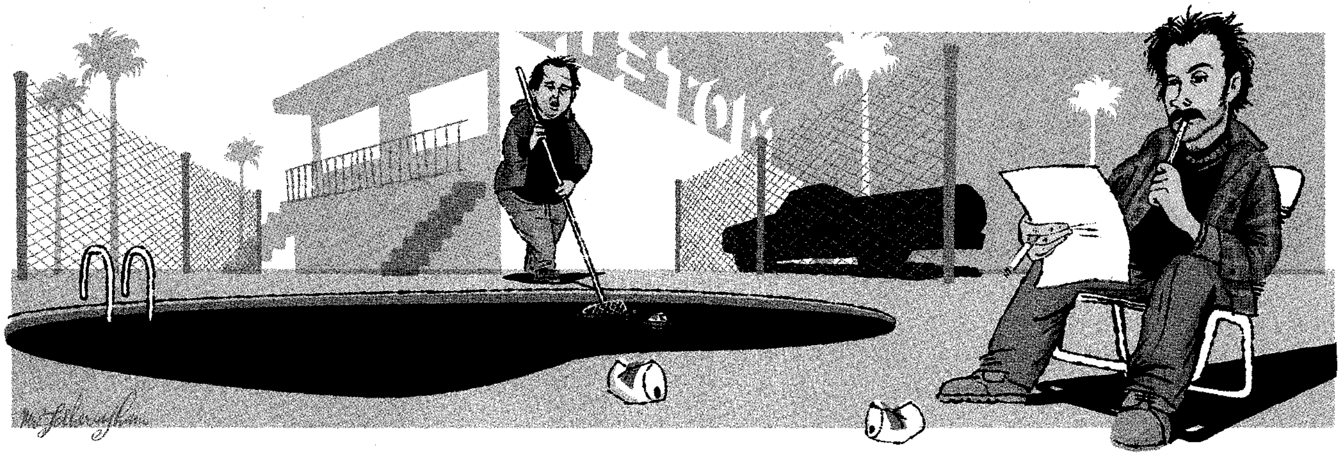
ON TELEVISION

BOYS IN THE HOOD

"My Name Is Earl" and "Everybody Hates Chris."

BY NANCY FRANKLIN

The sitcom is always being prematurely buried. In the last couple of years, as "Friends" and "Everybody Loves Raymond" departed from the TV landscape, the words heard at the genre's funeral were alternately "alas" and "good riddance." (Viewers who need to cling to "Raymond" can still see it in syndication twenty-four hours a day on every channel except CNN.) The supposed remaining bright spot was CBS's "Two and a Half Men," a show that seems more dependent than most on the cattle prod of its laugh track, and one that I have watched some two dozen times with a sporting interest: I want to be present when Charlie Sheen demonstrates that he has more than one facial expression. All the death knells faded away, however, when NBC's "My Name Is Earl" and UPN's "Everybody Hates Chris" (whose title, of course, deliberately sets the show alongside, yet also very much apart from, Ray Romano's series) débuted, in September. "Earl" is the most popular new comedy of the season, and "Chris" is seen as a potential crossover hit—meaning that it would be UPN's first black-oriented show to draw a significant number of white viewers. Apparently, the sitcom, which had been strangled by the kudzulike growth of reality shows, has been reborn.



Jason Lee, as a reformed lowlife in search of good karma, checks his to-do list in the hit sitcom "My Name Is Earl."

The success of "Earl" and "Chris," whether you like the shows or not, is good news for the networks and, more important, for comedy writers, who will probably get more work in the next couple of years than they have since the turn of the century. (It's especially good news for NBC, which went from first place to fourth among viewers between eighteen and forty-nine last year; in May, the network's commitments from advertisers for the fall season were reportedly down by almost a billion dollars from the year before.) The aftermath of "Earl" 's popularity isn't hard to understand—think of a bunch of lemmings, suddenly realizing that the form they abandoned can make money after all, trying to climb back *up* the cliff. What's harder to understand is the popularity itself. It has been attributed to the show's "quirkiness" and to its untraditional format, but neither of those qualities is anything new. "Arrested Development," a mostly better and more authentically weird show, has never found much of an audience, though Fox has given it three seasons to do so; the same is true of NBC's "Scrubs," which has been around since 2001. (Paradoxically, shows that don't get great ratings are often left alone during a period of drought; now that the sitcom is back, however, there will be more pressure on comedies to perform well instantly. So all those newly hired writers should also prepare—*immediately*—to be fired.)

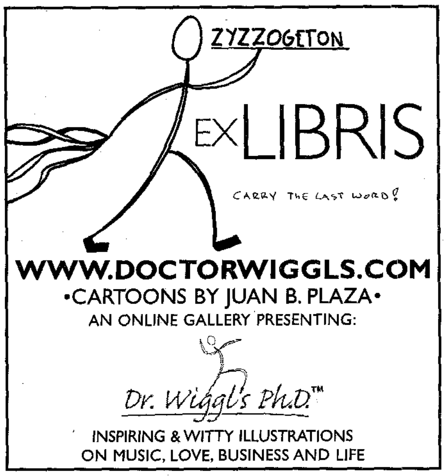
"Earl" had me grinding my teeth from its first image—a bobblehead dashboard figurine. I sensed that I was being handed a big can of whimsy and sent off against my will to camp camp. The cuteness continues in every scene, in every line of dialogue. Jason Lee plays Earl, a sociopathic lowlife who steals at every opportunity. In the voiceover that opens the first episode—a variation of which begins every subsequent episode, too—he says, "You know that guy you see going into the convenience store when you stop off in that little town on the way to Grandma's house? Sort of shifty-looking fellow who buys a pack of smokes, a couple of Lotto scratchers, and a tallboy at ten in the morning? . . . Well, that guy is me. My name is Earl." As he speaks, we watch an unsuspecting family—whom we briefly saw in the car with the bobblehead doll, listening to "The Monkey Dance" on the radio—stop at a convenience store; Earl runs to their car and steals a couple of CDs and a small American flag that he finds lying on the floor. Six years ago, Earl's narration continues, he got drunk and went to Vegas with a woman he had just met, and, when he woke up the next morning, he found himself married to her. As he looks over at her while vomiting into the toilet, he sees for the first time that she is hugely pregnant. You know that show that tries really hard to be quirky and unconventional? The show that winks at all its own jokes and, inevitably, shows someone throwing up into the toilet from the point of view of the toilet? Well, that show is this one. Its name is "My Name Is Earl."

The premise of the show is that Earl is turning his life around: after winning a hundred thousand dollars in the lottery and losing the ticket, he discovers the concept of karma when he hears Carson Daly talking about it on TV. Earl then makes a list of all the bad things he's done; one by one, he's going to go through the list—two hundred and fifty-nine items—and make things right, so that he'll have a better life. What "Earl" does have going for it is Jason Lee, an amazingly charismatic actor who can charm the blue off your jeans. Lee manages to make selfishness and monomania seem like delightful qualities. He used to be a skateboarder, and although he is now thirty-five and has a receding hairline, he's lanky and energetic, and he has a killer smile. His first big role was the slacker comic-book collector in the 1995 movie "Mallrats"; even then, he knew how to show a loser's leadership qualities and give fake sincerity a good name.

But "Earl," which was created by Greg Garcia, who co-created "Yes, Dear," an unpleasant traditional sitcom that has somehow chugged along for five years, is a depressing piece of work, as lacking in cleverness as last year's mystery hit, ABC's "Desperate Housewives." "Earl" gets its juice from movies like "Raising Arizona," "Dumb and Dumber," and "Me, Myself & Irene"—Earl fathers a black baby, as Jim Carrey's naïve character did (three times) in "Irene." And there is more than a whiff of "Mallrats" in the show. The karma thing gets old pretty fast, as does Earl's insistently genial narration. Maybe some see it as refreshing that Earl is still a jerk even after his epiphany—he busts into people's houses in order to do the nice thing he needs to do so that he can cross them off his list, and, when he finds out that a guy he used to bully is gay, he runs away in fright. There are some funny moments from other actors, especially Jaime Pressly, as Earl's venal and sharp-tongued ex-wife, and Ethan Suplee, who plays Earl's dimwitted brother. But, over all, the show is charmless and patronizing, and as refreshing as dust.

"Everybody Hates Chris," which was created by Chris Rock and Ali LeRoi, is based on Rock's boyhood in Bedford-Stuyvesant in the eighties. Tyler James Williams stars as the thirteen-year-old Chris, the eldest of three siblings, and Rock himself narrates the show. Rock hits some of the same notes he does in his stage act, though not with the same ranting intensity; here his observations—about race, about the responsibilities of being a big brother, about navigating his dangerous neighborhood, about his parents—are a little less raw. (In real life, Rock is the oldest of seven.) Chris is a misfit at home and at school; his younger brother is bigger and cooler than he is, and everything his little sister does wrong somehow ends up being his fault, according to his parents. At the school he goes to, which is two buses away—making him a misfit in his neighborhood as well—he is the only black kid.

Williams is a low-key young actor; it's hard to decide whether he looks thoughtful or just sleepy. He's not standard-issue cute, in terms of his appearance or his behavior—like a regular adolescent boy, he's blankish and inward, so it's believable when his character says and thinks both smart and dumb things. But the most touching aspect of "Chris" is its depiction of the parents, Rochelle (Tichina Arnold) and Julius (Terry Crews). Chris's mother is a piece of work: a fount of colorful expressions describing what she'll do to her kids if they don't behave, and openly proud of her family's relative prosperity—she's a "ghetto snob," Rock says. She also has a temper, quitting jobs right and left without cause. Chris's father is one of only four fathers on the block. This fact is not just used for one joke and then dispensed with; it's an integral part of the comedy, as is how hard he has to work to keep the family going. You mostly see him wearing one of two uniforms or his bathrobe; he's always either at work, getting ready for work, or sleeping between jobs—"a night job and a late-at-night job." Rock is able to find humor in every aspect of his childhood, and nobody is exempt. While not shying away from the racism he faces at school—the world was not so advanced in 1982 that the school bully was above calling him a nigger—the show doesn't discriminate. Talking about how much his father needed his rest, Rock says, "Taking sleep from my father was like taking ignorance from a rapper." ♦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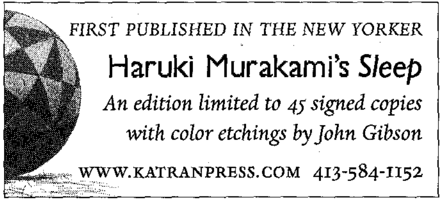
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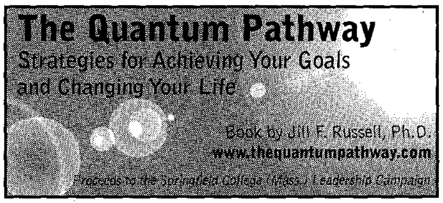
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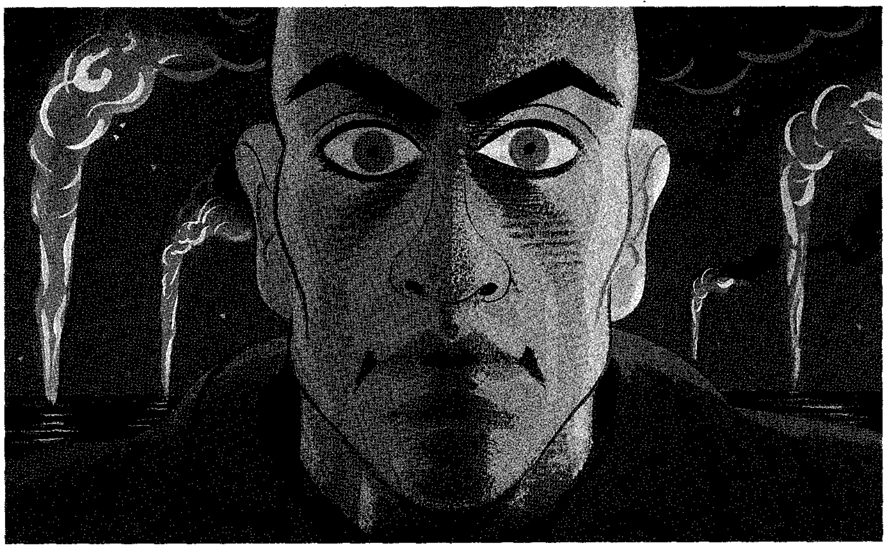
LOST BOYS

"Jarhead" and "The Weather Man."

BY DAVID DENBY

"Jarhead," which is based on Anthony Swofford's 2003 memoir of the Gulf War, gets under way with a standard scene of boot-camp training. Tony Swofford (Jake Gyllenhaal), a young Marine recruit, screams "Sir! Yes, sir!" as a drill instructor curses him out and slams him around. That noisy tyrant is an old acquaintance. In American movies, the drill instructor—unreasonable, unfathomable, louder than a public-address system—has become a comic staple, a licensed foulmouth who would probably disappoint moviegoers if he weren't so hammily outrageous. Tony survives, and passes into the hands of his next tormentor, Staff Sergeant Sykes (Jamie Foxx), the head of the special sniper unit that Tony has been assigned to. More terrific cussing follows, which Foxx delivers with a comic's practiced rhythm and speed. Tony, his ears ringing, also gets hazed by the other recruits in his squad, who handcuff him to a bed and threaten to brand him with the letters "USMC." The branding, however, turns out to be a put-on—the iron is cold. Tony is not yet enough of a marine to be branded by his friends.



Jake Gyllenhaal as a marine in Sam Mendes's movie, set during the Gulf War.

At first, "Jarhead" seems to be the latest version of a traditional American narrative: a young man enters the military, undergoes bewildering ordeals, ships off to war, and finds out who he is. The writer, William Broyles, Jr., who adapted Swofford's book, and the director, Sam Mendes, clearly want to remind us of the story's cinematic lineage. That boot-camp sequence feels like a reduced version of the head-bashing training episode in Kubrick's "Full Metal Jacket." Later in the movie, the trainees, before going overseas, assemble to watch Coppola's "Apocalypse Now," and when Robert Duvall and his men come roaring over the water in their helicopters and attack a small village, the trainees shout along with the "Ride of the Valkyries" on the soundtrack, stomping and cheering. The combat scenes in Vietnam War movies are like porn for them, a part of the way they rev up. They don't know, or don't care, that Coppola's sequence is meant sardonically, as an example of pointless overkill; they want to be terrifying, too.

The movie, it appears, is celebrating a barbarian warrior caste, a group of

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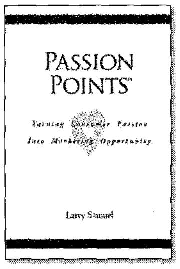

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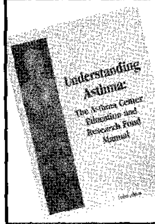

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testosterone-drunk daredevils. The word "jarhead" refers not only to the Marine haircut—Tony's hair is clipped high and tight—but to an empty vessel that gets filled with fighting instincts and Marine lore. When Tony arrives at camp, he is amused by the brutality and then frightened by it, but he quickly gets caught up in Corps manners—a process of manhandling every recruit into his proper function, which the recruits, in bursts of prideful masochism, accept as the only way anything can be done. As Tony gets pounded into shape, however, we don't get a firm grip on his identity. Jake Gyllenhaal's shorn skull has the effect of making his eyes look enormous and his mouth a clown's grimace, and he responds openly to everything; his face is a mask of pleasure and suffering. But, even as we're reading Tony's immediate emotions, the filmmakers don't tell us what's going on inside him. He brings very little temperament or history with him, and, if he has a self that's being enlarged or violated by what he's going through, we don't know what it is. But we expect to find out as he proceeds toward war.

Muscled, primed, and ready to go, the Marines arrive in Saudi Arabia in the fall of 1990—and there they wait. The coalition forces build up slowly, over months, and, as the screen time passes, Sam Mendes has a serious problem on his hands: how do you make something interesting out of endless sitting around? Mendes, the director of "American Beauty" and "Road to Perdition," suffers perhaps more than another director would from this peculiar situation—he has a strong feeling for visual patterning but a faltering dramatic sense. "American Beauty," his best movie, was shot in exquisitely designed jigsaw pieces that just barely fit together. "Road to Perdition" was almost decadently luscious—a glistening illustrated gangster saga—but dramatically ineffective. "Jarhead" isn't luscious, but it has been designed for painterly effect. Mendes and his cinematographer, Roger Deakins, establish both dominant and subordinate colors for a given sequence, and they produce some hallucinatory moments: the pale-brown desert seeps so far into the men's skin that they begin to look like sand crabs; red flames illuminate a dark night sky as hot oil rains down on the men, and we seem to be at the edge not of the desert but of Dante's fiery lake.

Stunning as an experience of hellish dislocation, the movie nevertheless comes to a stop in the sand and never really gets moving again. The heat is ferocious, and the men are instructed to drink bottles of water; they "hydrate" and then stand in a row, on a berm, pissing; they train in clumsy gas-protection suits, complete with masks, and horse their way through a football game in the stifling equipment; they undergo bizarre punishments, get into brawls and threaten to kill one another. For them, sadism and masochism are not two sides of the same coin; they're all that the coin is made of. A marine without a battle gives and receives pain in an endless cycle of frustration and nullity.

It gradually dawns on us that these young warriors aren't going to have their war. Tanks and fighter planes are handling the Iraqi Army, and Tony's unit turns out to be useless. Stymied, the men fall into a state of adolescent egocentricity: *We're just jarheads, a tough, crazy bunch of guys, and nobody gives a damn about us, especially the women back home who are supposed to remain loyal but who betray us*, and so on. Swofford's book gives way to self-glorification and maudlin sorrow, too, but you can enjoy the grit and flourish of his prose. In the movie, the men's manic disillusion becomes so violent and surreally unpleasant that we are put in the position of longing for them to saddle up and kill someone just so the picture can go somewhere. Only the test of combat can absolve all the screwing around and self-pity of its inherent infantilism.

"Jarhead" has an oddly amorphous and inconclusive feeling to it. We never do find out who Tony is, and his best friend, Troy (Peter Sarsgaard), who shifts back and forth between sanity and hysteria, is a mystery, too. The old war-story narrative may have run aground in the Gulf War, but since questions of courage and character are left up in the air, you wonder why the material wasn't played differently—with a greater sense of irony, say, or as absurdist comedy, in something like the style of David O. Russell's Gulf War movie, "Three Kings." What's left instead of laughter is a rather sour implication. Underneath all the rough-housing, there's a persistent sexual menace—towel-snapping in the shower and mock rapes and insults that depend on feminizing the victim of the joke. Broyles and Mendes are saying, I think, that men who are this casually abusive of one another's bodies could slip, without much provocation, into sexually humiliating detained prisoners. "Jarhead" is an inglorious portrait of military life which points to the next Gulf War and the degrading japes of Abu Ghraib and other prisons.

Paramount appears to be selling "The Weather Man" as a comedy, but it isn't, really; it's more a study in midwinter melancholia, Chicago style. "Chicago, that somber city," Saul Bellow called it, and I thought of Bellow (and I would guess that the screenwriter, Steven Conrad, was thinking of him, too) because the story of "The Weather Man" bears certain resemblances to that of Bellow's great novella "Seize the Day." The novella was set in Manhattan, but Bellow would have recognized all too well the midwinter gray-blue desolation of the movie. The ice on the lake cracks, the freezing rain comes down like acid, and David Spritz (Nicolas Cage), a weatherman for a local TV station, gestures in front of a blank screen, but he can't get the weather right—it's all shifting winds, he says in despair. Dave's life is all shifting winds, too. A fatuously likable on-the-air fellow, he's Chicago's most available celebrity. On the street, people either ask for his autograph or pelt him with trash from their cars. A forty-year-old child, he feels abashed every time he comes into contact with his father, Robert Spritzel (Michael Caine), a well-known serious writer whose self-assurance is so crushing that he needn't ever raise his voice to dominate other people. As Caine stands still, Cage scampers around the older actor's unmoving gravity like a terrier at the heels of a Great Dane. The two men hardly seem of the same species, yet it makes sense that Dave would run away from his father's authority even as he admires it and longs for it.

The director, Gore Verbinski, who is now in the middle of stretching the jaunty "Pirates of the Caribbean" franchise as far as it can go, would seem to be an odd man for this material, but he and Steven Conrad hold their ground, sticking to their conviction that Dave's story should play as a belated-coming-of-age movie. In the beginning, Dave is such a flop as a human being that he can hardly open his mouth or walk down the street without falling into some mishap. His wife (Hope Davis) has left him, and his kids are running into trouble, but he's neither stupid nor ignorant, and smart people who always screw up are like souls striving for grace. They flail around looking for help, and, if they're lucky, they realize, as Dave does, that God stops tripping up those who stop tripping up themselves. ♦

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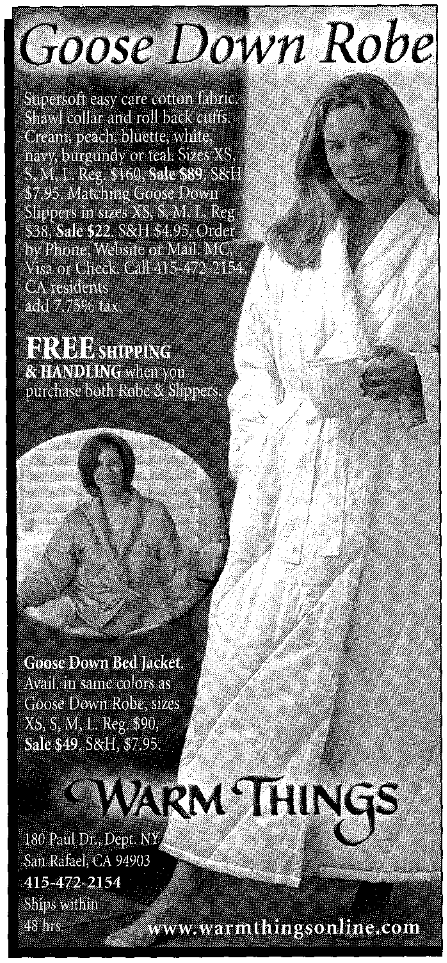
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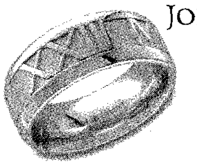
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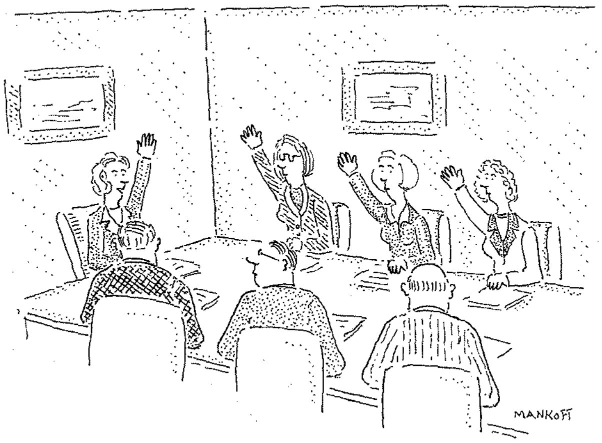
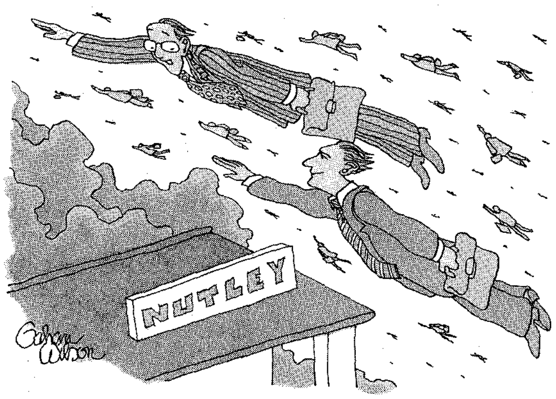
CARTOON CAPTION CONTEST

Each week, we provide a cartoon in need of a caption. You, the reader, submit a caption, we choose three finalists, and you vote for your favorite. Caption submissions for this week's cartoon, by Tom Cheney, must be received by Sunday, November 6th. Finalists in the October 24th contest appear below; go online to vote. We will announce the winner, along with the finalists in this week's contest, in the November 21st issue. The winner will be given a signed print of the cartoon. Any U.S. resident age eighteen or over can enter or vote. To do so, and to read the complete rules, visit www.newyorker.com/captioncontest.

THE WINNING CAPTION



"Well, then, it's unanimous."
Anne Whiteside, San Francisco, Calif.



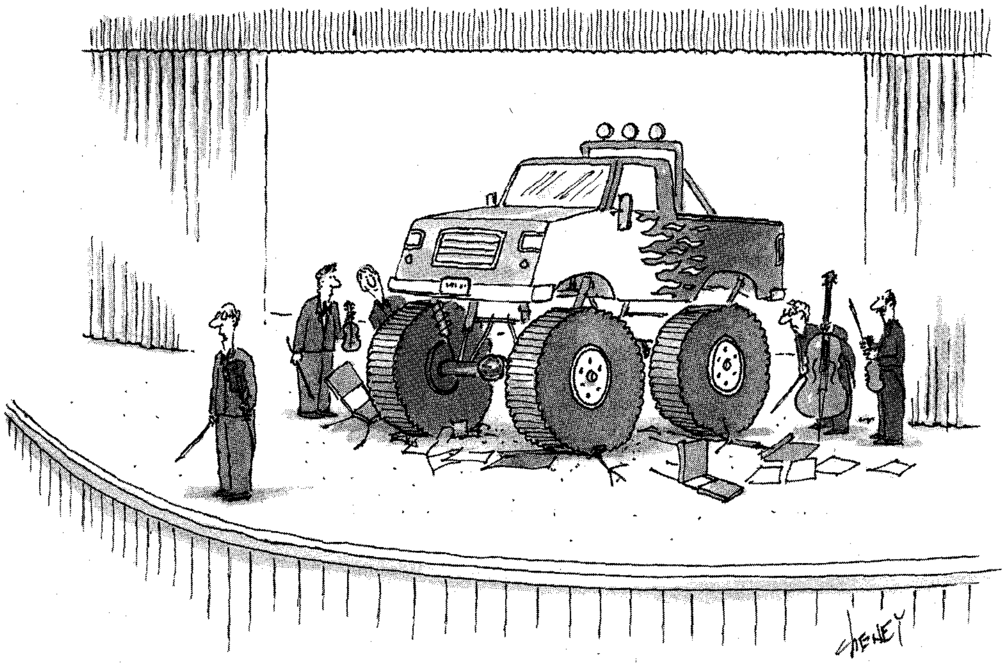
THE FINALISTS

"Hold my hand and we can use the car-pool lane."
Eric J. Adams, Penngrove, Calif.

"I had another one of those walking dreams last night."
Liz Moyer, Portland, Ore.

"Can you believe the fairy-dust prices these days?"
Michael Barham, New York City

THIS WEEK'S CONTEST



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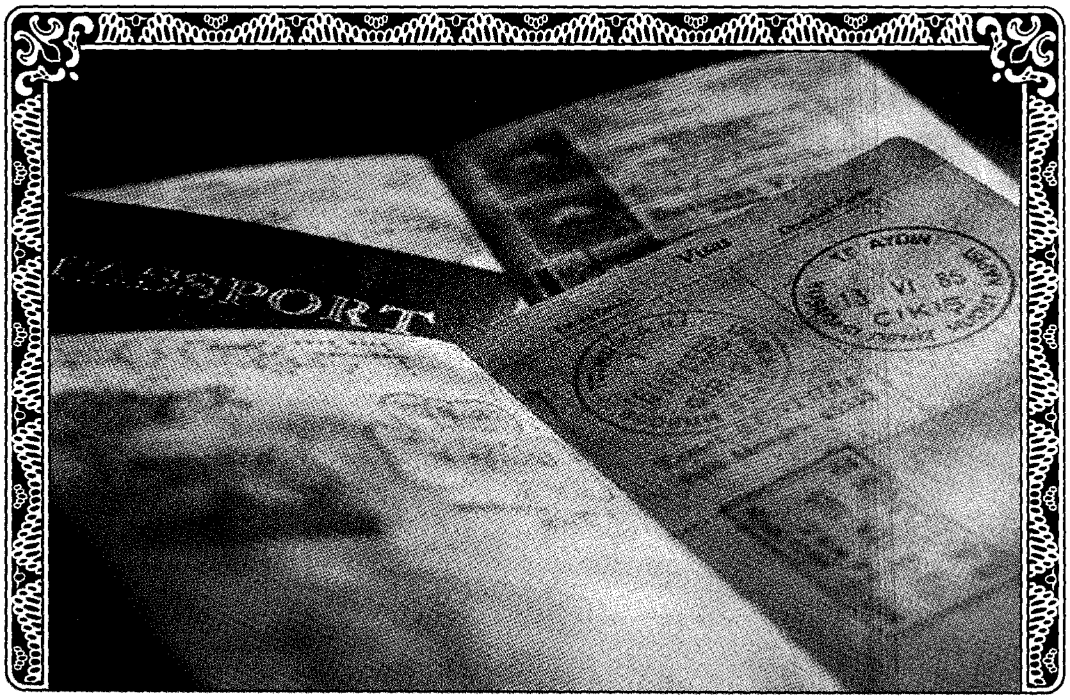

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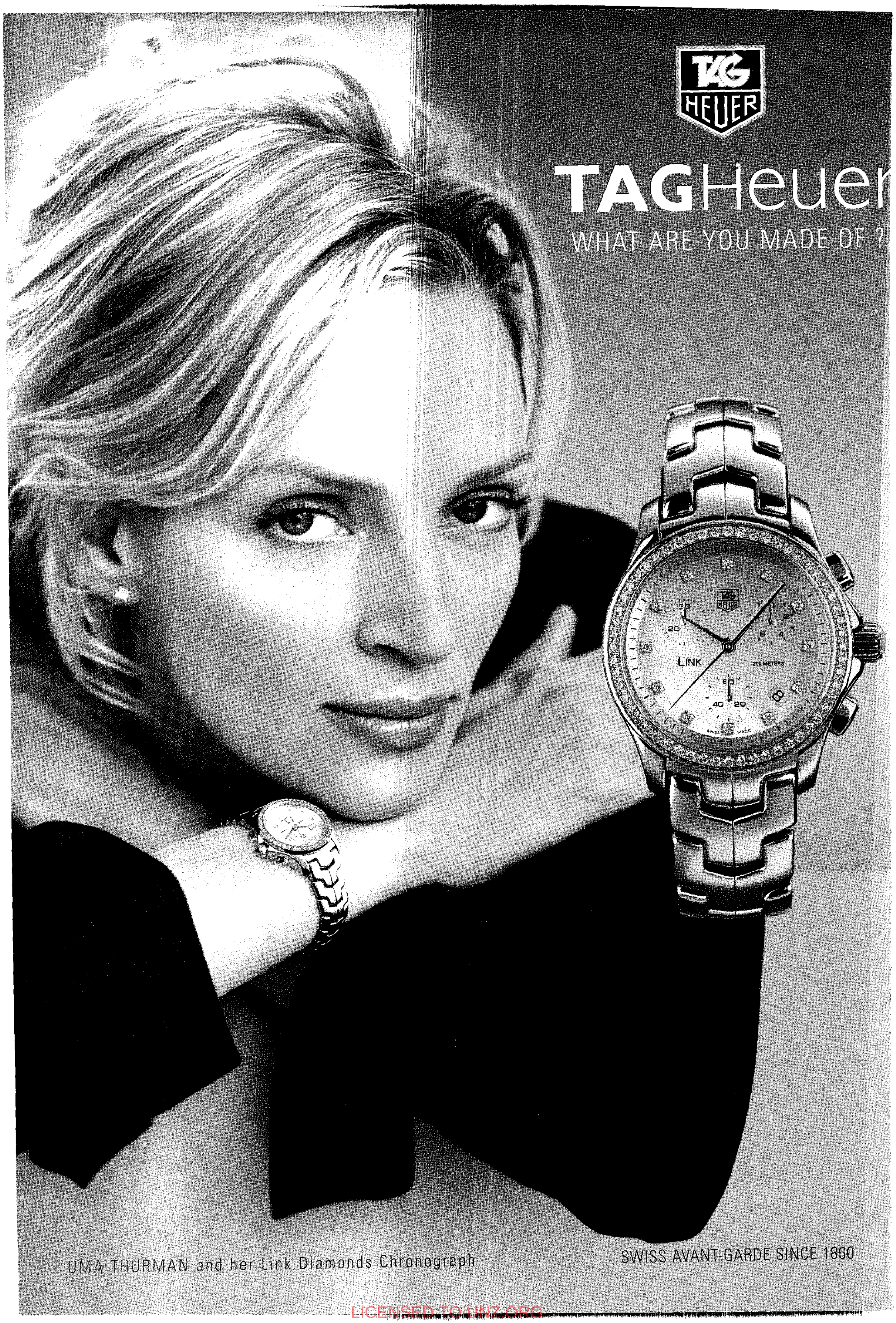

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